

**PATRIARCHY, ARMED CONFLICT
AND
THE AGENCY OF WOMEN IN KASHMIR**



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CERTIFICATE

It is certified that Ms. Vibhuti Ubbott, who was admitted for the degree of Ph.D in Political Science under my supervision has completed her research work. The title of her thesis is **“Patriarchy, Armed Conflict and the Agency of Women in Kashmir”**.

It is further Certified that:

1. that the thesis embodies the work of the candidate herself.
2. that the candidate worked under my supervision for the period required under statutes.
3. that the candidate has put in the required attendance in the department.
4. that the candidate has fulfilled the statutory conditions as laid down in **Section 18.**

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

For past two decades now, Kashmir has been in the grip of conflict situation. This conflict situation, defined by ascendancy of gun on the one hand and the political expression of separatism on the other, has placed people of Kashmir in a variety of roles, as victims of violence, as perpetrators of conflict, as active agents of militancy as well as separatists, as sympathisers of the movement, etc. Along with a number of militant organisations, numerous separatist organizations have been floated. Besides these, there are a number of civil society organizations, NGOs, peacemakers, etc.

The present study has tried to explore the role of women in this situation. Have they been the passive and mute spectators to whatever has been happening or do they have some active agency in themselves which gets reflected in their participation in politics?

Tracing women's activism in the region, one may refer to the political movement of 1930s and 40s. There was a very small class of educated women, and their role was quite limited. Though the National Conference was ideologically progressive party and offered a gender sensitive political charter in 1944, it was mainly in 1947 that women became visible in the politics of Kashmir. At that time Kashmir was invaded by Pakistan-supported raiders and a Women's Militia was formed which brought to the public domain not only Kashmiri women from lower class but also educated women from upper class.

Women have continued to form a very important part of the resistance and protest politics of Kashmir. Throughout the last six decades, they have been visible in most of the political agitations – whether it was the agitation during the loss of the holy relic in early sixties, or during the rallies of Plebiscite Front and in all kinds of mass demonstrations led by and in favour of Sheikh Abdullah. However, paradoxically the participation of women in protest politics has not been transformed into their emancipation and empowerment in public spaces. The fact that women have not been able to make any impact in the formal political activities, especially those related to the power politics, makes this point very clear. In contrast to the large

number of women protestors, the number of women who contest elections or get elected, has been very small. However, despite the limited participation of women in formal political activities, mobilization of women for protest activities has been a regular phenomenon which needs academic attention. It is a paradox which needs to be explained- women who are otherwise invisible in the formal democratic institutional politics assume a very active role when it comes to street demonstrations, mass protests, etc.

Women have been in the forefront in the present stage of resistance politics which started in 1989. Considering militants as heroes who were doing praiseworthy jobs, the women all over the Valley of Kashmir generated a mass support to the armed struggle. During early nineties, when mass support in favour of militancy and separatism was demonstrated through huge rallies, women were actively involved in it. Throughout the period of militancy women have asserted their role in the politics of resistance.

It is in the context of the mass participation of women in the movement politics of Kashmir that one can raise questions about the implications of conflict on women. Generally women are seen as the passive victims of conflict. Conflict is associated with masculinity and peace is considered a part of feminine nature. At the same time, there is general tendency in any system to prefer gendering of political discourse and the sexualizing of concepts related to nation, community, state and society. It is in the context of the binary division between masculinity and femininity that men and women are seen in the conflict situation in the opposite directions. While men are seen as perpetrators of conflict, women are seen as victims.

To cast women and men into the stereotypes of victims and perpetrators respectively, limits the scope of conflict analysis. Specifically, it undermines the ability of women to act as subjects, having an opinion and will of their own. The concept of agency recognizes the roles played by women in society. It challenges the dominant notion of attaching women with passivity and men with activity in conflict situation. It bestows on them, the capacity to work upon the social conditions to find out methods for facing all the extremities of life.

Using the concept of Agency, the present study has sought to discover the patterns of women's activism in conflict situation of Kashmir. Emphasis is placed on the exploration of the various possibilities of women acting as perpetrators, sympathizers or helpers of the conflict. The study is also aimed at analyzing different designs of patriarchy in the conflict situation of Kashmir. Like elsewhere, men were the first ones to take to arms in Kashmir and hence, the first ones to target and get targeted. But it is difficult to say that conflict here, like elsewhere, has been devoid of role of women. They may not be visible in the same form as men or may not be taking up similar roles as men. But they have been essential part of the conflict and their activism is manifested in varied forms, though quite different from that of men. When the men play active role as combatants, women do not remain confined to their homes. They come out searching for their men, confronting authorities and making every use of their disempowered positions to negotiate with them and their invisibility to move around. It has been often found that women are preferred agents to be sent to the police stations and talk to the police officers, when there is a need to do so. It is in the process of women acquiring new roles during the conflict situation that the very nature of patriarchy starts changing.

There are a number of ways in which we can see patriarchy changing its nature under the conflict situation. With the onset of armed conflict in Kashmir, there has been a necessity of women assuming the role of bread winners and the heads of the household. They learned new skills and took up all sorts of jobs. Women's traditional roles of being nurturers underwent a major transformation. In this manner, one could see women crossing the boundaries of domesticity and entering the public domain. However, a nuanced understanding of the conflict situation in Kashmir shows that while one can see the loosening of patriarchal structure in some manners, there are contradictory implications as well. As studies elsewhere have shown, patriarchal rigidities loosen up during the conflict situation, there is always a possibility that deep within, gender hierarchies and deeply anchored patriarchies at different levels are sustained. However, what is the extent of the change in the nature of patriarchy remains a question of research. The present study tries to explore whether conflict opens up space for empowerment of women or does it further subordinate them to the gendered institutions. The women's perception regarding the

same has also been accounted for. The present study, hence, endeavours to find out the changes in the premises of patriarchy under the conflict situation.

The agency of women- overt or covert is manifest in every stage of the conflict in the state. The experience of armed conflict for women cannot be built upon a single discourse. They have variety of ways to formulate their objectives as social actors. In case of Kashmir, for instance, one can refer to two absolutely different dimensions of the expression of women's agency. In one case, women have forcefully but silently expressed their agency by opposing the fundamentalist forces and their attempt to *Talibanise* the Kashmiri society and impose moral and cultural codes. All attempts to put obstacles on the mobility of women, and curbs on their educational and other kinds of freedom have been strongly resisted by them. Failure of various attempts to veil women of Kashmir shows the silent but powerful resistance of women to the forces of religious fundamentalism. There is another, altogether different kind of agency of women as manifested in their active role in the militancy. Dukhtaran-e-Millat and the Muslim Khawateen Markaz are the two women organizations which saw their emergence in spontaneous phase of the movement and were the symbols of woman's face of the politics of resistance. These organizations have played important role in breaking the male monopoly over militancy. However, these organizations have also contributed in reinforcing the moral and cultural codes inhibiting the freedom and the movement of women. Though taking women into the very male world of conflict and leading it from the front, these organizations have not been gender-oriented. On the contrary, these organizations have helped reinforce patriarchal norms of society.

It is in this context of the complexity of the relationship between patriarchy and conflict that the present study has been designed. It focuses both on structure of patriarchy and agency of women and explores various dimensions of the conflict situation where patriarchy has been invoked, enforced, reinforced, loosened or changed.

Some of the Research Questions that have been addressed in the present study are:-

- i. How is the Kashmiri society structured and how does patriarchy operate through it? What are the ways of situating women and allocating resources to them?
- ii. How do women conduct and contest these structural constraints as well as those that are being incorporated due to the changes brought about by conflict situation?
- iii. Does conflict open up space for empowerment of women or does it further subordinate them to the gendered institutions?
- iv. What has been the role of women in the conflict situation in Kashmir? Have they been the passive and mute spectators to whatever has been happening or they play active role in the conflict politics? Are they to be seen as victims of conflict or do they have some active agency? What are forms in which this agency gets reflected?
- v. Assuming that patriarchy survives by reinforcing and reproducing itself in the context of the changing situation, how does patriarchy respond to the conflict situation and what are the different forms that it assumes in the conflict situation of J&K.? What are the various changes that have taken place in the premises of patriarchy in the conflict situation in Kashmir?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the present study lies in the context of the limited theorizing of the gendered nature of armed conflict and a number of critical issues that have important implications for conflict that are still not widely recognized. The present study aims at contributing to more comprehensive understanding of the complexities underlying women's roles, responsibilities and interests in the situation

of armed conflict. Drawing on the experiences of women of Kashmir, the study tries to provide a holistic gendered analysis of the agency and identity of women in armed conflict. In this way the study intends to provide substantive new empirical evidence, which could lead to rigorous analysis of the complexity of violent conflict.

This study also adds to the existing literature in Women's Studies and aims at filling gap in the studies on the women in conflict. The research emphasises on the importance of agency perspective. In the realm of power relations, an asymmetry prevails in the relative positioning of men and women. The present study is significant in bringing forth the sensitization to the power relations of gender. The study is of great importance in finding out how contextually specific placement of females and males and their agency in a gender system, that is patriarchal to the core, determines their roles as social actors.

It analyzes the status of women in Kashmir in the dual context of conflict and patriarchy. It seeks to analyse as to how women were situated before and after the beginning of turmoil and what are the changes that have come about in their relative positioning vis-a-vis men in society. In other words, it seeks to analyse the impact of conflict on the gendered location of women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to de-mystify the notions about passive stereotypes about women and depict their dynamism in Kashmiri society. It tries to highlight the centrality of the women in the armed conflict in Kashmir. The study therefore looks into various methods and strategies that women evolved over the period to contest and counter the structural constraints and create spaces for themselves. The focus of the study, therefore, is on the agency of women in Kashmir.

The study has tried to discover the factors responsible for insufficient recognition of women's involvement and participation (both unavoidable and deliberate) in violent conflicts and the under/mis-representation of the gendered

causes, costs and consequences of violence. Hence bringing women into centre stage of theorizing about conflict remains one of the purposes of the study.

Lastly, the study seeks to bring to the surface, various grey areas that lie in the relationship between patriarchy and conflict situation. The purpose is to depict the changing tilts in the power imbalances inherent in patriarchal society in a conflict situation. Role of conflict in strengthening and weakening of patriarchy therefore has also been explored. The present study stresses upon an operational framework which will ensure that a gender perspective be incorporated into initiatives to reduce violence, negotiations for peace as well as solutions to bring peace and development.

The Study has been based upon following hypotheses:

1. Conflict situation impacts on the deeply entrenched social arrangements like patriarchy. As it impinges on the normal social contexts and causes certain digression in the long-established and culturally accepted norms and practices, conflict has the ultimate effect of loosening its grip and allowing women to restructure their gender roles and responses.
2. Conflict situation, by bringing women to the public space makes way for their emancipation and empowerment. Through their direct involvement in conflict as well as their activism and their support, women are able to assert their agency not only in the context of conflict but also in the context of the patriarchal arrangements.
3. The implications of conflict on patriarchy and gendered situation of women are not unidirectional. The same context of conflict while allowing women to contest and restructure their relation to patriarchy also creates situation in which they become subject of greater control. Conflicts are gendered in nature and not only reproduce the given context of power and control that is exercised upon women but also augments it, in certain situations.

The study is based both on the primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources like books, articles and other published material are used to understand the background of the problem and to place the issues related to gender and conflict in the perspective of the proposed study. Kashmir is a very well researched area and there is plethora of work on varied dimensions of conflict. Lots of books have been published within India as well outside which focus on the present phase of conflict. Similarly, there is good number of articles published in the leading journals. All that forms important secondary sources for the present research. For the present study, literature on women and women's activism in conflict situations in general and Kashmir in particular, has been reviewed.

One of the significant work in relation to the women's activism in conflict ridden societies is *Women War and peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, (Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001) by Rita Manchanda (ed.) which is a vital contribution to an understanding of women's neglected yet crucial role in times of war and peace and highlights the way in which women manage survival and reconstruction of their lives. The book challenges the centrality of men's experiences and theorizations of conflict. The chronicles in the book demonstrate women's variegated negotiations with conflict and their capacity to emerge as agents of social transformation. The book contains contributions having accounts of women's struggles from different parts of South Asia. In all the chronicles of the book there are some common issues that have been raised: the women have been worst sufferers in a war or conflict and an instrumental relationship is forged by movements with women, women's bodies are considered markers of the community identity and hence, the rape of the women is considered a threat to community honour and not the violation of a women's social being. The book tries to project the nature of the women's experience of armed conflict but the emphasis is laid on how it shapes women's responses.

In normal discourse, women are more often projected as victims of the armed conflict which is nothing but the undervaluation of their activism. The range of women's experiences in conflict situation including suffering, coping up and activism has been displayed by Rita Manchanda in her introductory essay- 'Where are the

Women in South Asian Conflicts?’(pp.9-41) She has shown that in conflict situations, women do not always accept whichever position is given to them. Instead they rise to the situation, workout equations and put up their new images, but, without disturbing the rubric of social structure.

The potential of conflict to provide opportunity for having an experience of power and autonomy for some women as well as to inflict trauma on some others has also been well demonstrated by Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake in the article – ‘Tragedy of Tamil Women in Conflict’(pp.102-130). She has shown how women fight on daily basis to sustain their families and also how, in the process, they happen to be agents of structural social transformation.

There’s an exclusive article on Kashmir, namely ‘Women in the Kashmir Conflict’(pp.42-101) by Rita Manchanda in the book. The article traces whole profile of Kashmiri women from being projected as victims to their coping up, their fighting back, their struggles at the private level to the public level. The article tries to make visible Kashmiri women’s multifaceted responses to the conflict which is a great contribution towards bringing into light, the importance of women’s roles and experiences in a conflict situation. Rita Manchanda has shown that the women’s activism in Kashmir is an outgrowth of their mothering as well as nurturing role. Woman’s private act, when politicized, becomes a public act and hence in doing so, a woman claims public space but, at the same time reinforces her traditional image.

One of the images of women is that of carrier of cultural exclusivity, on which the self-determination movements are generally based. In such movements, even less important aspects of cultural exclusivity assume utmost importance and subsequently, women bear the brunt of slightest deviation from the cultural norms. The importance of cultural exclusivity also finds mention in the article- ‘Women in Assam and Nagaland’(pp.131-176) by Paula Banerjee in the same book. She argues that women do not attempt at discarding their image in society altogether but, try to negotiate and come up with new versions of their image.

In the political history of Independent India, the issue of Kashmir has always been holding a prime place. It has been almost two decades since the conflict has deeply affected people's lives and their environments. No aspect of life has remained untouched by the conflict. The impact of the situation has made a much sharper impact on the lives of women and yet, very few discussions on Kashmir take account of this. An important book in this regard is *Speaking peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir*, (Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002) by Urvashi Butalia (ed.), which reflects the range of women's experiences in the conflict in Kashmir. The contributions in the book have been made by different kinds of women's voices including the voices of the Kashmiri Pandit women, Muslim women, refugee women from Jammu Camps and women from the remote parts of Ladakh. The book explores various issues like how has the conflict affected the women? How have they learnt to live with continuing violence? What strategies have they used to find a space to share or express what they are going through and much more? Essays, extracts from reports and other publications included in this book, have been written at different times and come from different backgrounds but, all of them depict some realities of women's lives caught in conflict in Kashmir. A strong desire for peace among women amid conflict has also been reflected by all the contributions in the book.

Another book of significance for the proposed study is *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence* (Zubaan, New Delhi, 2005) edited by Caroline O.N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark. The book provides a holistic analysis of the gendered nature of armed conflict and political violence and a broader understanding of the complex, changing roles and power relations between women and men during such circumstances. Through empirical case studies from different regions of the world, the book aims to address four key issues; women and men as both actors and victims; the stages of conflict as parts of a complex process with gendered implications; political, economic and social violence forming a continuum requiring gender analysis and local community organizations run and managed by women playing a key role throughout conflict situations in providing basic needs and critical advocacy. The book seeks to provide a holistic gendered analysis of the agency and identity of women and men throughout violent conflicts.

It's seen that the literature on political conflict tends to ignore the gender issues involved in the situation. This is due to the presence of public/private dichotomy in common perception. Such a perception draws its plea from the assumption of power being a male domain and women's sphere being viewed as powerless. The exclusion of women from power sphere has been highlighted by Simona Sharoni, in the essay 'Rethinking Women's Struggles in Israel Palestine and in the North of Ireland'(pp.85-98). She argues that 'this assumption is evident in the prevalent view of women as victims of conflict, which tends to overlook, explicitly or implicitly women's power and agency.'(Simona Sharoni: P-86). The consideration of women's agency has become a casualty of patriarchy, present in society in old and new forms. Though contestation of patriarchy is taking place but it's happening along with its reinforcement. Such a phenomenon has been depicted by Urvashi Butalia in the essay 'Women and Communal Conflict in India'(pp.99-113) in which she has examined the relationship of the women's movement to the issue of communalism. She has emphasized upon a rethinking within the women's movement arising out of increasing conflicts in India.

An edited book by Rada Ivekovic and Julie Mostov entitled *from Gender to Nation*, (Zubaan, New Delhi, 2004) contains essays that critique the way in which narratives of nationhood and womanhood naturalize and essentialize difference and hierarchy. The particular histories of different countries are considered in the essays. The essays belonging to India are located in the period after partition of the Country. In the introductory essay, editors argue that gender is a socio-cultural construction and so is nation. Women are seen reproducing the nation while men are projected as defending the same. Hence, practices of nation building reinforce the feminine and masculine images and also, support the existing differences between men and women. Listening to women's narratives of the nation could not lead one to draw same inferences about nation building as one can, by listening to men's narratives. Same has been claimed in the essay 'Gender and Nation: Some Reflections from India'(pp.99-112) in the book, in which writer Urvashi Butalia has given few narratives of women caught in the heart of the militant movement in Kashmir but all of them address some issues that are important from the viewpoint of proposed study.

The narratives show that patriarchy forms the context in which access to nation building is given to women.

One of the books highlighting the problems of women in the valley is *Multi-dimensional problems of Women in Kashmir* (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2007) by B.A. Dabla. The empirical study of this book, carried out in eight years in the sociological framework, tries to develop an understanding with reference to statistical data about the multifarious problems of women in the valley. The study revolves around the five sets of primary and crucial problems of women viz; Social Problems, Economic Problems, Educational Problems, Health Problems and Discrimination Problems. The book claims to present the real socio-economic conditions of the working women in various unorganized handicraft sectors in the Kashmir valley and provides suggestions for short- term and long- term planning/ programmes/ schemes aimed at solving the crucial problems of the working women. But, the book fails to provide any comprehensive review of women's conditions in the wake of militancy in the valley, especially, in the absence of men and revised societal arrangements. Dabla has resorted to the simplistic presentation of problems of women of the valley without taking cognizance of the various complexities arising out of the situation of armed conflict in Kashmir. The book has presented the condition of the women in Kashmir in terms of pure statistics and has been overburdened by a lot of data and hence, the human side of the story has been largely ignored. So, we can say that despite containing elaborate data spanning over such a long time, the book fails to make the necessary impact on the required theorization of Women's issues"

The book *Women, Citizenship and Difference* by Yuval-Davis, N and P.Werbner (Eds.) (Zubaan, New Delhi, 2005) focusses on the processes that have led to the gendering of citizenship and the counter-movements towards equality. A central theme in all the essays of the book is the discrimination among citizens by virtue of being different, here, of different gender. The ability to have agency and access to resources is a function of specific positioning of human beings in society. In the introductory essay, 'Women and the New Discourse of Citizenship'(pp.1-38), the editors of the book Pnina Werbner and Nira Yuval –Davis argue that a number of factors decide and are decided by the role of women in conflict but the extent to

which these factors exert their effect is a primary question to be addressed. Though being the subject of a nation and the member of a society are two disjointed concepts, in a conflict situation in which the issues of identity and nationalism are involved, women are projected as if they are icons of culture of a society and their bodies represent the area to which they belong and hence, are subject to greater control and they have to carry the cultural identity which is bestowed on them.s

In the essay *Political Motherhood and the Feminization of Citizenship: Women's Activisms and the Transformation of the Public Sphere* (pp.221-245), Pnina Werbner while citing the history of human development and the development of society (or societies in different countries) mentions some virtues like rationality, autonomy and equality that are viewed as masculine and argues that public sphere as well as politics which draw legitimacy from these virtues hence belong to men only. She says that 'all over the world, the naturalization of male privileges in the name of universal rights sexualized the public/private divide.' (Pnina Werbner :P-224)

The importance of moving beyond the conceptualization of women as simply victims of war towards one that embraces agency in war and peace has also been emphasized by Radhika Coomaraswamy and Dilrukshi Fonseka in their edited book *Peace work: Women, Armed conflict and Negotiation*. (Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2004) The papers in the book explore the multiple ways in which women relate with war and peace. The contributors challenge the simple visualization of women as victims of war and emphasize upon the notion that glorifies their agency, especially, in post conflict scenario. Their participation is assessed and their potential for shaping a more stable and peaceful society has been discussed in the book. It explores how the patriarchal structures of peace times persist in war times and hence the argument that, 'War is as much 'patriarchy by other means' as it is 'politics by other means' (Radhika Comaraswamy and Dilrukshi Fonseka, 'Introduction',P-4).

To gain understanding of the peculiar circumstances of Kashmir and Kashmir problem, various books focusing on the state of Jammu and Kashmir and particularly on Kashmir have been written. One of the important books is *Daughters of the Vitasta: A History of Kashmiri Women from early times to the present day* (Gulshan

Books, Srinagar, 2003) by Prem Nath Bazaz. The book provides historical perspective regarding Kashmir and imparts vital information of the conditions of Kashmiri Women in different periods of time. The book throws light on the social settings, distinctive problems, struggles, failures and successes of women of Kashmir in different phases of history of the region.

Another significant book in this regard is *Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir* (Vitasta Publishing Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2010) by Rekha Chowdhary (ed.). The book is important in understanding various nuances underlying the identity politics in Jammu and Kashmir. It presents an insight into the socio-cultural and political milieu of Kashmir and various perspectives into the Kashmir problem as well. One of the sections specially focuses on identity politics of women in the state which analyzes the rise of consciousness as well as other issues amongst the women of state.

Two books throwing light on relative positioning of women vis-à-vis conflict and militarization in Kashmir are *Islam, Women & Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan* (Tulika books, New Delhi, 2009) by Nyla Ali Khan (ed.) and *Between Democracy and Nation: Gender and Militarisation in Kashmir* (Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2009) by Seema Kazi. The books trace the conflict in Kashmir to the failure of state and democratic set-up in fulfilling the expectations of the masses in Kashmir. The books also delve upon the numerous intersections between gender and militarization in the region.

METHODOLOGY

The study has made use of primary data of various kinds including numerous reports, produced by the Government as well as by the Non-Governmental Organizations, which have been addressing the issues of the status of women in Jammu and Kashmir and addressing other questions like impact of conflict on women as well as violation of Human Rights of women. These include, the Census Report, the J&K Statistical Digest, the election data generated by the Election Commission of India, the Human Development Report of the Planning Commission of India, the

reports of the State Human Rights Commission, the documents of the State Commission of Women etc, These Reports give us first hand detailed statistical information about the position of women. Besides, the governmental reports, there are lot of reports generated by the Non-Governmental Organisations. Through last two decades of conflict, lot of NGOs have shown their interest in the impact of conflict on women. Some of the organizations like WISCOMP have focused on Jammu and Kashmir and have come out with detailed reports on the issues of Human Rights violations, the disappearances, displacement, and the like. These reports are useful for getting focused material on the issues raised in the present research. Apart from these reports, the Newspaper reports form a very important source of information. The implications of conflict, as these are felt by the society, are reflected in the daily news, special reports, commentaries and editorial pieces. Using the method of content analysis sufficient information from local newspapers has been incorporated in the study.

The problem being of current nature, it was important to go to the field and collect data by using empirical methods of research. Three such methods have been followed in the present study – Case Study method, Narratives and Survey. The Case study method was applied to collect information about the women activists. Few women who have played a role in the conflict in any manner were selected and studied including Parveena Ahangar who is the President of APDP, Aasiya Andrabi who is President of Dukhtaran-e-Millat and Zamrooda Habib who is a well-known separatist. Through the case study method, it was possible to understand the context of women's agency.

An important methodological tool used in the present research was that of oral narratives. It was intended to collect the experiences of women in conflict situation and to establish the connection between conflict situation and gender through their narratives. Drawing upon personal memories and experiences, these testimonies revolved around a number of issues. During the course of research, an attempt was made to collect number of narratives from the cross-sections of society. In this case, no formal questionnaire was used. The women were asked to reflect upon the incidents and experiences that happened to occur in their lives. Some open-ended

questions were put forth before the narrators and then they were allowed to follow their line of thinking afterwards. The women were encouraged to present their interpretations and their part of story about the way conflict had impacted their lives and the armed conflict in general. Through this method, women were allowed to present their perceptions of reality and in the process; they were able to come out with some important context specific issues. Some sensitive issues that are otherwise difficult to be approached have been addressed using this method.

A limited survey was also conducted in Kashmir, concentrating in Srinagar city only. To keep the study holistic, three categories of women were focussed upon. To begin with, fifty (50) affected women were interviewed. Approached through Association of the Parents of the Disappeared (APDP), these women included widows, half widows, those who had faced sexual harassment at some point of time, those who had lost their sons or any other male member in family and even those who lost everybody in the family, etc. After that twenty (20) activist women were interviewed. These women included those who had participated in protests, some had their male members involved in separatist movement, some had actually helped men in family escape arrests and few famous activists etc. Finally hundred (100) educated women were surveyed in Kashmir to know their perception about a range of issues. For the purpose, women were approached in Kashmir University and few colleges in and around Srinagar. Interviews of many girl students and academicians were conducted in these institutions. No structured questionnaire was used and the emphasis was placed on qualitative, instead of quantitative, survey for the study.

Other than these, some female bureaucrats, women running or involved in the work of NGOs, and some high profile women with political family background were also interviewed in the field work.

*PATRIARCHY AND ITS
DESIGNS: AN OVERVIEW
OF GENDER
DIFFERENTIATIONS,
CULTURAL ETHOS AND
POLITICAL
CONSTRUCTIONS IN
KASHMIR*

CHAPTER- 1

PATRIARCHY AND ITS DESIGNS: AN OVERVIEW OF GENDER DIFFERENTIATIONS, CULTURAL ETHOS AND POLITICAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN KASHMIR

Literally meaning rule of the father and generally understood as a social and ideological setting which puts men in a superior position to women, patriarchy has been defined as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Walby identifies six structures of patriarchy (household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, culture) that together are argued to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of women’s subordination”.¹

Seeing it from the context of the power, patriarchy can be seen as a system which is hierarchical in nature and wherein men have a control over women’s sexuality and productive aspects. One of the major functions of patriarchy in society is to create stereotypes in respect of masculine and feminine characterization which further accentuates the power differentials between men and women in society. Patriarchy is a very dynamic concept as it further varies with times and places as also with other social factors like class, caste and religion. But the only constant factor is the inferior position of women as compared to men in the society which takes the forms of discrimination, exploitation, inequality and inequity of women. Greater rights and status to women is an objective that is now recognized the world over to be pursued. But, its actual attainment depends upon the culture of the particular place. “Just as each country has its own unique culture and traditions, each society views the role of women differently. This will vary by country/ region and can be influenced by

¹ Jane Pilcher & Imelda Whelehan, *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p.95.

such factors as education, religion and cultural norms, the legal status of women and the degree of exposure to Western ideas and Culture.”²

Patriarchy, as seen by traditionalists, is borne out of biological differences between men and women. Since women give birth to children, they assume motherhood functions, perform household works and hence, ascribed the private sphere of society. “Anatomy is destiny” is the view held by Sigmund Freud regarding women and therefore, women’s position in society is the result of their biology. So the traditional viewpoint places women and men in private and public spheres respectively and holds strongly the ideal of public-private divide. Lacking any scientific proof, the biological reasoning for patriarchy has been largely dismantled and a socio-cultural reasoning has been proposed for explaining the concept of patriarchy. Various factors are responsible for patriarchy and the established superiority of men in society and various ways have been adopted by feminists to understand it and suggest ways to mitigate its effects. But, there is an overall census on the urge to understand the male-female differentials present in all sorts of institutions, the reasons for their occurrence and the methods to bring changes.

The inequality between men and women is the result of gender differences and gender based division of labor both in public and private spheres. Patriarchy works in the direction of maintenance of gender inequalities, which in turn leads to women’s subordination. Among various concepts which are invoked to justify patriarchy is the concept of dualism which underlines the presence of two opposites that are, masculine and feminine and also creates a hierarchy between them. There are various institutions that help in reinforcing gender differences and the sustenance of patriarchy like family, educational institutions, religion, media, knowledge systems, social practices, norms and values. Since, Gender itself is a social construction and is learned in society, it takes different forms in different forms. That is the reason that patriarchy needs fresh interpretations in different circumstances.

² United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ‘Women and Conflict: An Introductory Guide for Programming’, 2007, p.3, pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadj133.pdf

Patriarchy uses different strategies to achieve its objective both in private and public spaces but the objective is single one i.e. putting women in disadvantaged or inferior position. Various feminists have suggested that these strategies fall into two categories i.e. exclusionary and segregationists. The exclusionary strategy works in a direct manner. It oppresses women at individual level. The subordination of women is done, in this case, by the men in their lives and that too individually i.e. the personal or private lives of women are controlled by the men in their homes. Hence, at the personal level, women are made to feel powerless by reaffirming their subordinate status in the family. On the other hand, the segregationist strategy put women in inferior position by excluding women effectively out of public arena. The public space is declared men's domain and the private space is ascribed to women. In this way, women are kept aside from the power struggles of public sphere also. So the women's experience of subjection of private sphere is reinforced by their powerlessness of public sphere and the whole project is maintained by the ideology of patriarchy.

In order to locate the context in which the agency of women in Kashmir is to be studied, the concept of Patriarchy needs to be placed in the background of Kashmir. Knowledge of the past of society and the various changes that have taken place over the years proves instrumental in understanding the present day realities of that society. There have been quite elaborate accounts of social scenario of Kashmir by different writers, but, most of them lack the focus on gender as a factor influencing different events, institutions and processes. Construction of women's identity over time in Kashmir cannot be achieved in a simplistic manner. As can be aptly pointed out about Kashmir, "the areas of women's studies, issues and history under diverse socio-economic, political, religious and cultural processes, predominated by patriarchal structures down the ages, remain unexplored. Though a rich field of investigation and bearing far reaching implications, hardly any scholarship has focused on analyzing the issues within new theoretical frameworks, matrices and research and questioned the old paradigms."³

³ Krishna Misri, 'Identity of Kashmiri Women' in Rekha Chowdhary (ed.), *Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir*, Vitasta Publications, New Delhi, 2010, p.301.

So far the representation of women of Kashmir in historical accounts is concerned, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* is a substantive contribution towards the portrayal of Kashmiri Society from pre-historic time to 1149 A.D. Kings, Queens, their life styles and the events attached with them are the subjects of the book. But, the book is lacking in presenting the full picture on two accounts viz; the condition of lower classes and the position of women in society. The writers who followed Kalhana's time indulged into same fallacy. A sort of sequel to the Kalhana's book is presented by Jonaraja by accounting the period from 1150 AD to 1450. But, hardly any document suffices in throwing a clear picture of the Kashmiri women over the period. Pointing to the severe shortfall of formal historical accounts about Kashmir in this regard, Krishna Misri States:

Even the rich and uninterrupted historiography mostly gender neutral, is problematic. Selective women, measuring up to male standards, have been glorified, while others, who significantly impacted the Kashmiri ethos down the centuries, have been glossed over. Surprisingly, Lal Ded (also known as Lalla Arifa), the most outstanding Kashmiri woman, post/mystic, who continues to inspire and is invoked by Kashmiri's of all faiths in times of 'personal dilemma', does not figure in Jonaraja's *Rajatarangini*, though he updated Kalhana's famous chronicle and covered the historic period. Nor did Shrivara or Shuka, who succeeded him, mention her in their updated narratives.⁴

However, Kalhana has limited his treatment of the women to those belonging to the royal or noble families. As has been noted by Kalhana and other historians, Queens in ancient Kashmir were quite influential even when they were not directly ruling over the area. A number of Queens such as Yashovati, Sugandha devi, Didda, Kotadevi etc are found filling the historical accounts of Kashmir because of the roles played by them during their lives. The demands of the situation brought these women in centre stage of the scene and they proved their worth rightfully. Infact, the Hindu rule in Kashmir was closed by a woman ruler, that is, Kotadevi in 1339 AD.

⁴ Ibid, p.302.

Daughters of the Vitasta by Prem Nath Bazaz is another significant contribution towards analysing the identity of Kashmiri women over the time but, it also presents some skewed understanding of women's position in different periods of time in Kashmir. Echoing earlier historians and invoking the bright picture of Kashmiri women, Bazaz states:

Broadly speaking, from early times down to the thirteenth century AD, Kashmiri women enjoyed remarkable freedom, wielded ample power and exercised responsibility which gave them a high status in society. Members of both the sexes equally shared joys and sorrows of life. Not that the Kashmiri women were absolutely free from the agonizing restrictions which the ancient Hindu Society imposes on the fair sex.⁵

So far the validity of the historical accounts about women of Kashmir is concerned, they seem more exaggerated versions of what could have been the reality. "Nonetheless, a myth of golden age is evoked and this has functionalized as a historical truth. It is believed that women had reached pinnacles of power in ancient times."⁶

From the perspective of women's studies which tries to explore the socio-cultural and politico-religious positioning of women in society, the descriptions of Kashmiri women presented by Rajatarangini as well as other historians fall nowhere near satisfactory. Kalhana represents a lot of class consciousness and patriarchal mindset while mentioning the position of women in Kashmiri society. There is a specific class of women which has been accounted for by Kalhana. Women with high social standing form the subject of whatever little has been written by him about women. Women's daily struggles and perseverance as also their achievements have rarely been accounted for. As critiqued by Krishna Misri,

⁵ Prem Nath Bazaz, *Daughters of the Vitasta: A History of Kashmiri women from early times to the present day*, Gulshan Books, Srinagar, 2003, p.3.

⁶ Krishna Misri, no. 3, p.305.

However, enmeshed in myth, legend, folklore, supernatural elements and superstition, Kalhana's historiography hardly stands scrutiny on modern scientific methodological grounds. The women's identities that emerge from the pages of *Rajatarangini* are closely connected with their birth, religion and notions of "purity" of that era. Embedded in parochial cultural norms of Varna, caste and gender insensitivity, the historical perspective is exclusive and narrow. Yet, the vision is amply reflected in the images of queens, queen-regents, commanders, diplomats and women with spiritual potential that are projected as empowered. It is this class/caste of women who occupied centrestage, and also happened to be subjects of Kalhana's historical concerns.⁷

Kalhana has kept silence about few categories of women. The appearance of any category of women has been subject to their status in society. Despite of focusing on royal palaces and kings as well as queens, the elements that were indispensable part of royalty but stood low on status were conveniently ignored. As Misri states, "Hosts and hosts of woman slaves, attendants, wet-nurses and dasis who kept the palaces and harems going, are voiceless and invisible."⁸

Kalhana has glorified the women who followed norms, prescribed by culture, religion and traditions and has held a low opinion about the women who have tried to transcend the limits imposed by society. Moreover, many mortifying practices related to women have not been criticized. Instead, they have been praised by him.

Further, he idealized the primitive and ghastly practices of Sati, enforced widowhood and socially sanctioned polygamy. The exploitation of women in the "golden age" took several forms of prostitution such as a flourishing system of concubines (with no marital status) and devdasis, women dedicated to the services of

⁷ Krishna Misri, no.3, pp.306-307.

⁸ Ibid

temples. These degrading and oppressive practices robbed women of their dignity and marginalized.⁹

Referring to Rajatarangini and Kalhan Pandit, Parvez Dewan states “He tells us of (Hindu) kings who plundered temples, of horny queens and their libidinous consorts, and of kings who had some specific strengths and other specific weaknesses.”¹⁰

The women who did not fall into the socially approved frame have been perpetually disapproved by different authors on Kashmir’s history. One of such work is L N Dhar’s essay ‘An Outline to the History of Kashmir’¹¹. Referring to Dhar’s work, Asha Hans notes,

Nationalist interests have perceived women as objects to be controlled. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that different historical understandings have produced different constructions of female roles. Dhar implies that Queen Didda transgressed the role circumscribed to females and therefore, presents her as a target of contempt and ridicule. As the historiography of pre independence years in India from a feminist point of view has yet to be explored for a more authentic rendering, older histories would need to be examined.... The exclusion of women from these shared memories of history influences women’s place in the current nationalist discourse.¹²

The leadership abilities and the management styles of women have rarely been accounted for in the historical pieces about Kashmir. Where Queen Didda has been mentioned as a ‘very unscrupulous and willful lady’ who ‘led a very immoral life’ by

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Parvez Dewan, *A History of Kashmir*, Manas Publications, New Delhi, 2008, p.25

¹¹ L.N Dhar, ‘An Outline to the History of Kashmir’ in *Kashmir: The Crown of India*, Kanyakumari Vivekananda Kendra, 1984.

¹² Asha Hans, ‘Women Across Borders in Kashmir: The Continuum of Violence’, *Canadian Women’s Studies*, Vol.19, n.4, pp. 77-87, p-78.

L.N Dhar, talking about her, Parvez Dewan says ‘ ... she proved an unscrupulous, cruel and bad administrator, getting rivals and their families killed’. ¹³So, seeing the treatment met by history and historical pieces, it can be inferred that social norms and rules differed for men and women in Kashmir.

In contrast to the formal history, the folk tradition of Kashmir has been generous to the women of the region. Lal Ded and Habba Khatun are the two names which can be considered co-terminus with the culture of Kashmir. Patron Saint of Kashmir- Hazrat Noorani’s spiritual teacher Lal Ded or Laleshwari, who rose to spiritual attainment in fourteenth century, is the woman whose presence can be strongly felt in Kashmir. Sixteenth century saw the rise of a girl from moderate rural background, namely Habba Khatun to the position of the wife of a King, Yusuf Shah Chak. The folk tradition has imparted important positions to both Lal Ded and Habba Khatun, by carrying their sayings down the ages. But, they haven’t got a fair deal from formal history.

As far as the actual position of Kashmiri women is concerned, analysing the identity of women in Kashmir is easier said than done despite the presence of rich historical accounts about Kashmir like Rajatarangini. The Social set up consisting of caste-class break ups, geographical positioning, languages spoken, historical background as also the ethnic background are some of the factors that contribute towards the formation of identity of people residing at a place. In case of women, some additional factors like gender differentiations and local ethos of the society work towards constructing their identity. Hence, an analysis of formation of Kashmiri women’s identity is not an easy venture. It is compounded by the fact that the available sources on the information about them are not in plenty. However patriarchy is one factor which makes its presence felt in all periods and phases of Kashmir’s society.

¹³ Parvez Dewan, n.10, p.22.

In view of the multiple realities underlying the phenomenon of patriarchy and gender, the position of Kashmiri woman in society can be assessed by tracing its historical connections. There are many references in the historiography of Kashmir which points out that the Kashmiri society used to uphold the practices like Sati, discrimination against girls, preference for male child, etc. Faithfulness of women towards their husbands was highly valued during the lifetime as also after the death of the husband. At the same time, a woman remarrying or having relation, even after her partner's demise, has been looked down upon.

A partial view of the society, ignoring lower class and caste women, dominate the historical writings about Kashmir. Viewing from the patriarchal standpoint, the behaviour of the women conforming to the societal norms and practices has been glorified and considered appropriate. Women, subject to the traditional practices, accepting the responsibilities bestowed on them and struggling to fill in the gaps or voids created by the absence of men, here and there, have been pictured as the perfect examples of empowered class of women in society and the society itself is depicted as the progressive one.

However, the time that followed this phase in Kashmir has been characterized by pushing women into the four walls of home, losing the effective freedom and a downward trend in their progress. By the middle of 14th century, Muslim rule got established in Kashmir. The condition of women of Kashmir got better off or worse off is not a simple question to answer. "Nevertheless, it may be candidly admitted that with the establishment and consolidation of the Muslim rule in the valley, women were gradually and increasingly deprived of those rights and privileges which they had acquired and enjoyed for many centuries, may be thousands of years."¹⁴ But, at the same time, "While bemoaning the lot of Kashmiri women under the Muslim rulers we must be grateful to Islam for the blessings which it conferred on them. It was the humanist element in the philosophy of the new faith and the liberal outlook of certain sultans which saved the women from the horrors of the inhuman practices upheld by the Hindu society."¹⁵ The Islamic rule was followed by Sikh rule for a small duration

¹⁴ Prem Nath Bazaz, n.5, p.13.

¹⁵ Ibid, 2011 p.17.

from 1819 to 1846 AD and then, Dogra rule till the state attained independence in 1947.

POSITION OF WOMEN IN KASHMIR BEFORE 1947

To establish the exact position of women in Kashmir at any period of time is a challenging work. But one thing is certain that there has been a well-grounded patriarchal system with concrete constraints imposed on women in Kashmir. Quoting Shamla Mufti, Sumona Dasgupta notes,

Before 1947 the condition of Kashmiri Muslim women was one of complete suppression. There was stiff opposition to sending girls to schools, general illiteracy was common among women, the hold of the orthodox ulma was strong, purdah was strictly observed in upper and middle class families.¹⁶

The period saw the women of Kashmir subject to all the restrictions and regulations that were considered gender specific so that their learning into the seemingly appropriate behaviour for girls can take place, that is, handling house hold chores and expertise in making food and taking care of other family members.

The first stint of reforms and modernity was brought to Kashmir by Christian Missionaries in, as early as, 1863. Missionaries ventured into the field of health and medicine in the state, soon to be extended into the field of education. The scenario in both these areas was utterly grim in the state. Despite of facing a lot of opposition from the local rulers and the traditional mindsets of the local population, the missionaries succeeded in introducing girls' education in the state. Though the region saw first school quite late, not before 1880 however, the first girls school opened sometimes between, 1893 to 1895 but, that too, after facing a lot of hurdles. It was in the beginning of 20th century that the region got its first women's hospital, run totally by lady doctors and nuns from convent. "The story of the struggle of foreign lady

¹⁶ Sumona Dasgupta, *Breaking the Silence: Women and Kashmir*, WISCOMP, New Delhi, 2001, p.21.

missionaries against male arrogance and distrust, racial and religious prejudice, deep ignorance and truculent authority, forms a glorious chapter in the history of cultural renaissance in Kashmir.”¹⁷

So, where the first girls school was opened by missionary ladies in 1893, it was in 1912 only that a committee was appointed to look into the feasibility of opening girls school in the state by the Government. The Pandits were first ones to take benefit of girls education in Kashmir. The first primary girls school was opened by state government in Srinagar for Hindu girls with a severe shortage of female teachers to teach. Subsequently, state government opened a Muslim school in Srinagar in 1929 for imparting education to Muslim girls. Though government ventured into female education in 1912 itself, it was till 1920 that not even a single girl passed out of these educational institutions with a matriculate and very few attained the middle standard education.

The patriarchal ethos can be held responsible for such a scenario in the region. One of the reasons for women not being educated was that it was in the public domain. Due to the strict patriarchal norms, lives of women were confined to the domestic sphere and they were not expected to be joining the public institutions even for the purposes of education. In upper strata of society, there were even norms for sex-segregation and veiling. However, women of lower class in Kashmir were not subject to hard veiling and normative rules guided by patriarchy. Though, women from higher and elite classes lived behind veils and followed orthodox lifestyles, women from middle and lower rungs of Kashmir could not afford to keep themselves aloof from the enlivened social and economic life of the area. Infact, they were very much at the heart of the productive processes, whether those of the artisan class or the agricultural or of the urban workforce. The traditional cottage industry of Kashmir, including the shawl and carpet industries, was very much dependent on the women workforce and so did the agricultural sector. Women were at the core of the farming processes. In urban areas, women were involved in various trade activities. Hence, the fisherwomen, the boat women and vegetable seller women have been very much part

¹⁷ Prem Nath Bazaz, n.5, p.214.

of the city life of Srinagar. Referring to lower classes with special focus on trader and artisan classes, Arther Zia argues:

... there existed a unique form of gender equity, born of a complementary relation between the men and women as they pursued their family trade. Amongst the fisherfolk, women took care of selling the catch while men procured it, in the baker community males baked the goods and women were responsible for selling. It is not unusual to find numerous eulogies to the unique contributions of the tradeswomen; tributes to their beauty, industriousness and wit in Kashmiri literature and folklore are replete. In rural areas, women have always been counted as sturdy workers tending farms, cultivating rice, and raising cattle. Other professions that women have been historically involved in are dairy farming, embroidering carpet weaving and vegetable vending besides being the traditional birth attendants as well.¹⁸

Notably, though Kashmiri women's contribution to the economic activities was enormous, the effective control over the resources was still lying with the men. Kashmiri women were lacking in all the social indicators of growth and modernity. A few efforts were made by some philanthropists in association with and under the influence of the Europeans. For instance, inspired by Indian Women's Association founded by Annie Besant, some theosophists from Kashmir formed an organization called Women's Welfare Trust in 1926 for "advancing the welfare of the Kashmiri women by imparting to them knowledge, by stimulating home industry among them and by promoting their physical health and well-being."¹⁹ Along with others, work done by Professor Toshakhani and Aftab Koul Nizamat in the aforesaid trust in the field of education was enormous. To quote Bazaz:

¹⁸ Ather Zia, 'Kashmiri Women: Concerns, Milestones and Solution', *Kashmir Affairs*, http://www.kashmiraffairs.org/zia_Atther_Kashmiri_women.html

¹⁹ Prem Nath Bazaz, n.5, p.222.

It was Toshakhani's uncommon mental vigour and profound faith in the cause of women that put the trust on its legs. He reared the organization during its formative period as a father would bring up his own child.

Aftab Kaul Nizamat was the heart and soul of the Women's Welfare Trust. It was the passion of his life to labour, night and day, for the progress of the institution.²⁰

Through all the years in which fringe advancements were touching the Kashmiri society, the response of the rulers of the region remained dismal. However, the last Dogra ruler of the state, Maharaja Hari Singh brought many reforms in the region that proved significant in welfare of women, especially, in the educational sector. In consultation with his secretary, GEC Wakefield, he sponsored the formation of Women's Welfare Association in 1929 which had to address the issues of 'illiteracy, poverty, disease and backwardness among women'.²¹

SOCIAL REFORMS RELATED TO WOMEN

The introduction of education itself ushered in the era of reforms in Kashmir. Kashmiri pandits formed the first group to introduce social reforms in the society, especially, in the fields of widow remarriage, curtailment in marriage expenses, alteration in the traditional but inconvenient dress sense etc. The period of reforms, incidentally, coincided with the political turbulence in the valley which began in 1931 against the fendal rule of dogra rulers. Reforms amongst the Muslims, subsequently took off in the valley but the earliest gainers were Pandits only. As stated by Bazaz,

For various reasons the movement for social reform was confined to the Pandits. They had made rapid advance in education, achieved a bit of political power by capturing subordinate jobs in the administration and were beginning to extricate, themselves from the

²⁰ Ibid, pp.222-223.

²¹ Ibid, p.230

effects of long and deep slumber. The Muslims, on the other hand, were still backward and almost uninfluenced by the impact of modernism, at any rate so far as their womenfolk were concerned. They had made very little progress in higher education and could not therefore grasp the importance of emancipation of women for the healthy growth of society. The educationists and the social reforms mostly belonged to Hindu fold and though some of them were liberal enough to extend their sphere of activities to Muslims as far as they could discreetly do so, yet they could not, on the whole, exercise any appreciable influence over Muslim women.²²

The organized efforts towards bringing the social reforms began with the formation of a small group of emancipated Kashmiri Pandits in 1930 called Fraternity which assumed the name of Sanatam Dharam Young Men's Association or Yuvak Sabha in 1931. The association worked towards bringing a lot of reforms, especially related to its social practices in the community. Right from bringing changes in the traditional dress of Kashmiris to widow remarriage, from stopping wasteful expenditure in marriages to paying attention towards education of community, particularly, of the women, the association was involved in a variety of activities. The appeal of the association was also quite impressive among the masses. Many prominent reformers devoted their full energies to the different causes in the society. The name of Kashyap Bandhu needs special mention here as he worked incessantly for uplifting the Kashmiri society. Bazaz notes:

To implement its social reform scheme in 1931, the Yuvak Sabha launched a vigorous campaign to educate public opinion. Advantage was taken of the excitement which had been generated by the political upheavals. The spacious grounds of Shital Nath became the headquarters of the movement from where guns of publicity were fired and trumpets blown. Public meetings were held in every part of

²² Ibid, p.241.

Srinagar which were largely attended. Efforts were made to enlist the cooperation of women in making the scheme a success.²³

So far as the Muslims were concerned, they were not left untouched by the changes in the society. As has been mentioned earlier, many of the evil practices of Hindus were discontinued when Kashmiris converted to Islam and women, in many fields, were relieved by the libertarian aspects of Islam in the early years of its introduction itself. . However, notwithstanding the liberal environment provided by Islam, there were many restrictions on women. The successive control of Kashmir in the hands of outside rulers like Mughals, Pathans and Sikhs subdued the women more and more into the private confines of homes. Meanwhile, the influence of religion and priestly class over the Muslims of the region had the impact of reinforcing the patriarchal norms of society. The nineteenth century society of Kashmir underwent serious internal churning with religion as the major resource. As Chitralkha Zutshi has noted, there was an intense competition between different sects of Islam, especially between those following the Sufis and those favouring the ‘modern’ and ‘pure’ form of Islam. It was in this environment that a space was created for progressive movement, though in the political sphere to begin with, but which had its impact on social sphere as well.

POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND WOMEN

The political movement against the feudal rule began in the beginning of 1930s The nature of political struggle to begin with was quite communal. The initial response of Kashmiris to their economic oppression was defined by their understanding that they were ‘Muslim subjects’ of a ‘Hindu ruler’²⁴ and that their disempowerment is mainly due to their having a different religion as compared to that of their ruler. In 1931, there was a mass upsurge in Kashmir on an issue related to

²³ Ibid, pp.253-254

²⁴ Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, Permanent black, Ranikhet, 2004.

religion. However, this upsurge that was quite spontaneous at that time, was to take more organized form in the later period. The All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, the first political organization of Kashmir, was established in 1932. The purpose of this organization was mainly linked to the pursuit of the interest of emerging educated class of Muslims. It was only in the later period, that the movement was secularized when the Muslim Conference was converted into the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference in 1939.

The early politicization of Kashmiris, under the banner of the Muslim Conference, was quite exclusive in the sense that it was limited mainly to the Muslims and the Kashmiri Pundits were not part of it. This was both due to the reason that the politicization was quite based on religious sense of belonging of Kashmiris and also due to the fact that many Kashmiri Pundits were beneficiaries of the feudal system and did not want to be part of the movement against it. This is the time when the divergence in the two communities of Pandits and Muslims gained prominence in the region. The response of the women to this divergence was not in any case different from that of the men. Identifying themselves with the community identity, their response was not in any case different from that of the men. "It left no alternative for women of the two communities but to adopt attitudes and assume roles similar and akin to those adopted and assumed by their respective menfolk."²⁵

The women of Muslim community participated in the ensuing agitation. However, due to the low level of education and the excessive control of religion on them, they could neither reach any level of leadership position nor could take the credit of the movement. However, this was the time when the tradition of women in protest politics was started. Women, especially those belonging to the lower classes were quite visible in the demonstrations being organized at that time. However, there was a class character to the women's participation. Since the women of upper class and elite sections were confined to the four walls of their home and some of them were also living behind the veils, they did not take part in the movement. But, the women from lower class and traders section, formed the soul of the movement. As Bazaz notes:

²⁵ Prem Nath Bazaz, n.5, p.245.

In 1931-33 women would appear on the streets in large numbers at a moment's notice in days of tumult and excitement... The public meetings held by the Muslim political workers were everywhere attended by women especially when the speaker happened to be Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah or any other leader of eminence.²⁶

The political movement during the middle and late 1930s was transforming itself in Kashmir and taking a radical turn. This had significant implications for women's status and political participation. With the conversion of Muslim Conference into the National Conference, socio-economic content was added to the political movement and the leadership sought to offer substantive changes in the society, economy and politics. Influenced by the left leadership of India on the one hand and the Indian National Congress on the other, the NC adopted an ideological framework that sought to demolish the feudal economic structure via the land reforms and other radical economic measures. The ideology of NC however, extended beyond the economic factors and also contained a strong social content. It sought abolition of structures representing feudal system as well as the monarchy, and aimed at introducing welfare policies especially for peasants and artisans and recasting the economic mould of the society. More specifically, gender sensitivity was reflected in this ideology. The New Kashmir Manifesto which was adopted by NC in 1944 concretized this ideology. Among the most important parts of the Manifesto were the Peasants' Charter and a Workers' Charter. Along with these charters, there was also a Women's Charter. This Charter was a very forward looking document and offered women the political rights of representation as well as various measures for their social and economic upliftment.

The political rights that were offered to women by the Charter included the Universal suffrage for women above the age of 18 years; right to be elected as members in representative institutions; as well as consultative and participatory rights. In all matters concerning women that were to be decided by elected organs of the state were to be adopted after due consultation with the representatives of the women.

²⁶ Ibid, p.246.

Among other rights which were extended to women in the Manifesto included the right to employment in all departments of the state. A number of forward looking suggestions for women were contained in the charter like those related to same wages as men for similar work; right to follow any trade or profession that women are capable of doing according to their will and consent; social insurance to women working in industries; provision for antenatal and post natal care and medical aid for women; paid maternity leave for six months before and after delivery; baby care and kindergarten facilities etc. Some social rights were also committed to women in the charter like legal protection to the status of women; protection from trafficking; and prostitution; and special care of problems of women belonging to backward tribes and backward regions of the state. The legal and educational rights of women were also not ignored by the charter which guaranteed the right to choose husband according to a woman's will and discretion; abolition of dowry system; right to obtain divorce and separation; equal and humane treatment of women prisoners. The educational rights included compulsory and free education for all women; mobile schools for nomadic and boat schools for boat women; scholarships to women at all levels.²⁷

An assessment of the New Kashmir Manifesto of National Conference clearly shows that it presented quite a positive and progressive outlook so far as the rights for women were concerned and that was a reflection of the time in Kashmir in which the society itself was showing a lot of promising changes on the one hand and the radical political movement on the other.

Summing up the political role of women during the pre-1947 period of Kashmir's politics one can argue that despite the massive politicization in Kashmir during this period, women were relatively less mobilized. The period following 1920s was a period of political movement which acquired the mass character in late 1930s. It was during this time that the mass of peasantry, artisans and working classes joined the political movement. However, despite the fact that women were part of all these classes, their visibility in politics was not as sharp as that of men. There were two

²⁷ Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, *New Kashmir Manifesto* http://www.jknc.in/uploadfiles/8a2ed918-f302-4831-8910-d3d301635197_nayakashmir.pdf.

kinds of women who did participate to some extent. First, those who belonged to the lowest strata of society like the Hanjis or those who had acquired some education and belonged to upper middle classes. The women belonging to the first category were not as strictly bound by the norms of conservative society as women in general were and enjoyed relative freedom of mobility in the public spaces. The second category of women was of those women who came from families having elite background with political connections. They were educated and had started registering their presence in society. But their number was so small that they could be counted by names. They included Zenab Begum, Sajida Begum and Krishna Misri, as well as Miss Mehmooda Ahmed Ali Shah. Most of these women were of exceptional family background and therefore formed the first group of women leaders in various educational and social fields. For instance, Ms. Mehmooda evolved as the well-known educationist of the state who later became the principal of prestigious women's college of Srinagar. She was educated at Aligarh Muslim University and was left oriented. Right from the beginning she was a political activist. Similarly Sajida Begam and Krishna Misri also earned name in the field of education. Most of these women, apart from having elite background were also having familial political connection. They were introduced to politics of the time through their family members. It is in this context that one can refer to Begum Abdullah who was thrown into the political domain due to her family background. Being wife of Sheikh Abdullah she could find place for herself in the political sphere. She was later to contest the election of Parliament and become the Member of Parliament.

Other than these women, women in general were not part of the political movement. The reason for the phenomenon can be traced to the culture of Kashmir which was defined by patriarchy. Women were confined to their domestic role and they were not supposed to be part of the political life. Even in the situations in which women were involved outside their homes, for example in agriculture, women were restricted by their domesticity. Within the working classes, there were a large number of women who were involved in the handicrafts. However when the workers were mobilized these women were excluded. The reason for this lies in the tradition of trade unionism. Kashmir has had a strong tradition of trade unionism even when any other type of politics was not seen in the region. However, the trade union politics

was mostly dominated by men. Since men used to work for wages, the trade union politics in early years of twentieth century was also left to them only. However, despite the limited role that women played in the politics during this early period, they were exposed to the intensity of political mobilization and were to acquire a level of political consciousness. It is a different matter that they were not visibly in the public domain, but yet they could not have remained untouched by the political developments taking place in the Valley.

By the time the political movement reached its zenith during the Quit Kashmir movement in 1946, women were mobilized to some extent. However, most of the women who participated in this phase were, again, belonging to working classes. This was the time that tradition of women participating in the demonstrations started. Women belonging to lower classes started participating in protest politics. These women were joined by some upper class and educated women who also participated in the movement. These women generally came into political arena through family connections and were related to top level leadership. Being educated, these women were driven by the progressive ideas and influenced by the radical leadership, particularly, the left oriented leadership. This group of women became very visible during the tribal invasion of Kashmir. It was during October 1947 that the tribals from Pakistan attacked the Indian part to reach as close as Baramulla. Since the state had yet to accede to India, it could not defend itself. The Maharaja's forces were too weak. In the situation as it had evolved, the Maharaja had sought help from India but India had shown its inability to send forces till the Instrument of Accession was not signed. There was therefore some time gap between the time when the tribals attacked Kashmir and the Indian forces landed in Kashmir. It was during this time that a voluntary force defended the Kashmir. This force, namely, National Militia was organized by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah for protecting the Kashmir and its woman wing called Women's Defence Corps was one of the earliest women's militia formed in the region. As members of this Corps, "women patrolled the city day and night with arms, kept vigil, guarded strategic bridges, and approaches to the city, banks,

offices etc. With paramilitary training in weapons, some of them were deployed with army detachments to fight the enemy at war front.”²⁸

The joining of Women’s Militia by the women of Kashmir carried a lot of symbolism. Without going to the actual battlezone, the women of Kashmir proved their powers. It cannot be denied that somewhere the family connection to the politics and specifically, National Conference was a reason for these women to join Women s Militia. Mostly the women who joined the force belonged to the families whose men had joined the Militia. But, most of them, including Begum Abdullah, were already active in social life of Kashmir. Referring to the other prominent members of Women’s Self Defence Corps (WSDC), Misri thus notes:

Miss Mahmuda Ahmad Shah, a pioneering educationist and champion of women’s empowerment, along with other leading women, was in the forefront of WSDC. Begum Zainab was a grass root level leader. She took charge of the political deimension of WSDC. Shouldering a gun, she was in the forefront, leading women’s contingents. Sajjada Zameer Ahmad, Taj Begum Renzu, Shanta Kaul and Khurshid Jala-u-din joined the ‘Cultural Front’ and worked with Radio Kashmir as anchors, announcers and actors. Several women writers and poets emerged on the literary scene and contributed to the cultural renaissance that followed down the decades.²⁹

The women who joined the militia were given formal military training. This training imparted by the profession men from army background ranged from physical fitness to training in handling weapons. They even needed to participate in different parades too. After the training, the women became proficient in shooting and handling guns and in the process, they gained a lot of confidence. Hence, the formation of Woman’s Self Defence Corps can be seen as a breakaway point in the history of women of Kashmir. To quota Misri again,

²⁸ Krishna Misri, quoted in Nyla Ali Khan, *Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir : Between India and Pakistan*, pp.116-117.

²⁹ Ibid, p.117.

With its multi-faceted and radical activities, Women's Self Defence Corps (WSDC) was a harbinger of social change. It provided a forum where women steeped in centuries old traditions, abysmal ignorance, poverty and superstitions could discuss their issues. Attired in traditional Kashmiri clothes and carrying a gun around her shoulders, Zoon Gujjari symbolized the WSDC. A milk vender's charismatic daughter, hailing from a conservative Muslim family that lived in downtown Srinagar she received well deserved media coverage.³⁰

Though many women who were part of the WSDC belonged to the newly emerging educated class, there were also some women who were from very humble background. There is reference to participation of an ordinary woman like Zooni Gujjari in WSDC.

Situation changed a lot after the Accession and after the formation of the interim government led by Sheikh Mohd Abdullah. Sheikh, soon after taking over power started undertaking major policy decisions to translate the ideological blueprint of National Conference into concreted actions. Following the promises made in the New Kashmir Manifesto, the government went in for the most radical land reforms. The state introduced many other pro-people political decisions including the decision to introduce mass education. Women were tremendously benefitted by this policy decision. The massive infrastructure created by the state for the primary, secondary and higher education resulted in extending the class of educated people in the state. Along with the women of urban areas, rural women too began reaping the benefits of education after 1947. Srinagar got its women's college in 1950 and with it, the vistas of higher education opened up for women. The opening up of women's college was a very emancipatory step as the new fields of professional and university education opened up for women. As Farida Abdulla Khan states:

Colleges for women were set up by the state under a socialist program rather than by elite groups or philanthropic organizations with their own agenda for

³⁰ Ibid, pp.116-117.

women's education. The goal was no longer to produce 'good' mothers and 'dutiful' wives, but partners in the development and progress of the region and its people and the emergence of a 'New Kashmir'.³¹

By the end of 1980's, there were greater number of schools and colleges exclusively for women. Infact, the number of girls higher secondary schools rose manifold and the women's college made its presence in almost every district. The number of women increased even in professional colleges opened by government. With the opening up of the Jammu and Kashmir University in the state, the earlier hesitation among the parents, to send their daughters for higher education, got away and the number of women opting for higher education increased. Earlier they had to go outside the state. So, the number of women who were educated and subsequently pursuing various professions and careers saw an upward trend. With all these changes, a general change in outlook of society was also taking place where women were increasingly looked upon with respect and at the same time, women tried hard to make space for themselves. To quote Dasgupta:

By the 1960s a considerable number of women had come out of the purdah. School and college education became a routine matter and women entered new professions as teachers, lecturers, doctors, lawyers, as well as the service sector. However, class and regional disparities continued. The new educational trends also had an impact on the pattern of marriages with the increasing demand for a working wife. The lack of a job was expected to be compensated by dowry creating new social pressures.³²

In the similar vein, Misri notes that education helped women to overcome their inhibitions and help them evolve their modern identity. She notes:

³¹ Farida Abdulla Khan, 'Other Communities, Other Histories' in Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, *The Diversity of Muslim women's lives in India*, Rutger University Press, 2005, p.136

³² Sumona Dasgupta, n.16, p.22

Stepping out of the shadows of usual familial, caste and religious identities, they emerged with their own professional identities in diverse fields of activity. The changing landscape saw them making their own small choices and this reflected in their dress, demeanour and deportment. Breaking free from purdah, many donned sari which did not symbolize a particular identity then! The changeover was self-motivated and not due to coercion. Women had come into their own. Reconstituting themselves, they exhibited confidence to break the shells of stereotype images, and projected new images of modern and professional women.³³

However, most of these changes remained confined to the elite class of women. At the most, education spread to the newly emerging middle class. However, a large mass of women remained outside the loop of education. Though the female education caught up with time, the literacy amongst the women of Jammu and Kashmir has been quite low till recent times. A large chunk of population, especially, rural population could not make most of the opportunities provided by liberal educational policy of the state government.

However, what remains the most passive development in relation to women in the post-1947 period, relates to the political status of women in Kashmir. On the whole, barring few instances, the democratic political scene in post 1947 period saw little role for women. The formal politics in the state lacked the presence of women. As Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal states:

Women in mainstream politics have been more marginalized with the significance of an agitationist role for women diminishing in the post 1947 scenario. Women have grouped together in struggle and then relegated themselves to the four walls of their homes. But even this tradition does not appear to be universal. While public space for women in a political role is more conspicuous in Kashmir Valley, it

³³ Krishna Misri, n.3, p.311.

is hardly witnessed in Jammu region, barring Poonch, where women were known to have played a role in the pre-partition politics and post-partition communal riots and then gradually slipped back into the shadows.³⁴

The available data of past elections reveals that the number of woman contestants has always been very low as compared to the male contestants. For that matter, the electoral politics, per se, see very insignificant participation of women in the state. The visibility of women in electoral politics is limited to their role as voters. Following the trend in other parts of India, women in Jammu and Kashmir have not been successful in turning into a political constituency. Gender does not seem to be a factor in determining their voting behaviour, nor do they form a constituent of population, important enough to be engaged and pleased. Gender does not occupy the space as significant as religion, caste or community in electoral politics. Hence, even election manifestoes and campaigns during elections by different political parties severally lack gender component.

There has been significant gap between men and women in all dimensions of formal politics like number of contestants, number of women winners and even number of voters and interestingly, with so much modernization and emancipation in society taking place, not much change is taking place at this front. Infact, where the number of female candidates in assembly elections is improving partially, the percentage of female winners to total female candidates has fallen drastically.

The majority of the women in the state do not identify themselves with any political party. There is no denying the fact that the woman's wing has been formed in every political party, but with little role in the decision making of the party itself, it assumes a subordinate status in it. The rallies, that take place not so frequently, and the meetings of the party invite public attention and hold importance in giving a face to the party before people and hence, necessitate the presence of women even if it is symbolic only. It is also noticed that in the party functioning and structure, the woman

³⁴ Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, 'Women's Identity and Politics in Jammu and Kashmir' in Rekha Chowdhary (ed.), *Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir*, Vitasta Publishing, 2010, p.339.

leaders, who form the cadre in woman wings are held quite low in importance and preference due to which, the women do not feel free in their actions in the party itself. Even those women who keep on working in the party for years together do not get their due respect and share in decision making, let alone the positions in the party. The number of women who rise to occupy positions of importance in party setup is very low. Due to lesser number of women making upto the assembly, the women in charge of any ministry are further less.

As the trend in South Asia as also India goes, the women in politics are mostly related to the men who have already been to leadership positions. Kashmir is not an exception on this account. The women leaders of the state are relatives of male leaders and instead of rising from the cadres, they are mostly nominated by party leadership. The prevalence of patriarchy in Kashmiri society can be traced as a reason for the same. Emphasizing upon the role of gender hierarchy in society in subordinating women despite of rising education and career options, Misri notes,

The Kashmiri women entered the public space, while their domestic conditions continued to be predominated by the outmoded feudal structure and attitudes. Even the social attitudes remained unaltered. Balancing their career choices within these structures added their responsibilities and burden. While they were coming to grips with their new identities in the public domain, the private domain demanded conventional and traditional roles. The transitional period was tough. There was not much encouragement from the families either. Their transitional period was tough. Their work and achievements, at times, came to be developed. They came to be projected as neither good mothers nor good wives, which added to the given “guilt complex” of a working woman. Majority of working women had little control on their earnings. These contradictions manifested in new forms of social and economic exploitation of women. They could make few choices and assert their subjectivity. The limited empowerment did not enable them to

question the unquestioned patriarchal hegemony and power relations.³⁵

The argument of patriarchal subjectivity of women can be put forth to explain the phenomenon of absence of women in public arena and may be extended to describe the subordination of women in the conflict situation as well. Strangely, assuming leadership and decision making in various fields of life is still not considered a forte of women in Kashmir.

Recently, Kashmir has seen the rise of some women leaders but most of them belong to one or the other political family. One of them is the daughter of AG Lone, Shabnam Lone. A.G Lone is the separatist leader of Kashmir but, Shabnam Lone has joined the mainstream politics to contest the elections. Though Shabnam Lone's two brothers had joined separatist politics and were already famous when she joined politics after her father's death, Shabnam claims to be carrying the political tradition of her father. Lawyer by profession before joining politics, Shabnam used to represent her father and Yasin Malik in court when no other lawyer was ready to do so and hence, she was in a way associated with separatist politics but, defying her background, she decided to contest elections in 2008. Shabnam Lone is known for her activities in the area of human rights. She fights cases on behalf of other separatists also and holds an image more of a rebel rather than conformist.

Interestingly, Shabnam Lone's father had been a well-known separatist and now even her two brothers-Bilal Lone and Sajjad Lone are into separatist politics but, she stood in the elections when there was boycott call from the separatists which established her as an individual with independent choice. Infact, in the absence of many women role models in politics, especially in Kashmir and seeing her personal as well as family background, her decision holds all the more importance and upholds her individuality and autonomy.

³⁵ Krishna Misri, no.3, p.313.

Another name in politics worth mentioning is of Sakina Ittoo who joined politics after her father's assassination. Her father was a senior leader of National Conference and she too joined same party. She had to leave her career in medical profession to join politics. She became a minister after her 1996 assembly elections win. She again acquired ministry after winning 2008 elections. Though Sakina Ittoo had to leave her professional career in order to join politics after her father died, which seems more as a compulsion rather than a choice but she has made her presence felt strongly in the system during her tenures as minister in the state. Sakina Ittoo presents another example of resilience and rising to the occasion in Kashmir.

One of the most prominent names in the politics of J&K is that of Mehbooba Mufti. Her father, Mufti Mohammed Syed, has held different positions in the Congress ministries including Home Minister of India. She has been one of the founders of People's Democratic Party and has largely been responsible for PDP's success in forming govt. after 2002 elections. Though having a political family background, she is quite a popular figure and leader in her own right. The launch of PDP party in 1999 was followed by the display of pro-people approach in politics of Kashmir and Mehbooba Mufti was instrumental in bringing such a approach to the region. The campaign carried by the party was called 'healing touch' respectively and presented a much sought after breather to the people of Kashmir who were tired of the continuous violence in the valley. In such a scenario, Mehbooba Mufti has got the distinction of identifying the concerns of people and bringing to light various human rights violations taking place in the valley. Infact, she campaigned her healing touch policy so aggressively that her father, Mufti Mohammed Syed could steer clear his name of all the objections over his role as Home Minister of India when the militancy was in its early phase in the State. As noted by Bhasin:

Mehbooba Symbolises a new phase in the culture of politics in Jammu and Kashmir, underlining the space and acceptability of a women in politics- not just as a participant but as a decision maker. Mehbooba, who had a major regional party People Democratic Party, may have entered active politics by fluke, winning on a Congress ticket for the only reason that she happened to be Mufti

Mohammed Sayeed's daughter. Later when her father floated Peoples Democratic Party, she broke away from Congress and joined a party that take up the plea of human rights and favours a dialogue with all sections of society including separatist. Mehbooba was perhaps the first mainstream politicians to have brought the human rights issue into the political ambit, defining the Kashmir problem as not just a political one but also a human one. It is the women, who become central in Mehbooba's bid to make the humanitarian issue of killings and violence political. The move has helped her create a base in the valley, especially with women's support, in the mid and late 90s, when human rights abuse was not being recognized either by New Delhi or the government headed by Farooq Abdullah. Strongly, this politics of humanitarianism, which reaches out to larger number of women has been more iconified than exercised on the ground. Nonetheless, her role cannot be negated in the backdrop of a poor history of women's participation in active politics; stemming from various reasons like lack of literacy, conservatism and in the last 19 years, the conflict.³⁶

Joining politics by drawing legitimacy from their backgrounds is not a recent phenomenon in the state. Sheikh Abdullah's wife was a prominent political figure in the state. Begum Abdullah remained the Member of Parliament and influenced the state politics in a forceful way for a long time. Interestingly, Begum Abdullah joined politics through the family connections and infact her husband had quite an influence on her but she displayed enormous growth in the political field and didn't quit after her husband's death. On the contrary, she herself became a forceful figure in politics. Similarly, sister of Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq, Zainab Begum was an important figure in state politics though, even she joined political field via family connections.

But, all the above mentioned women together form a very small portion of the larger picture in Kashmir which has always been dominated by men. The women have not been able to make an impact in society in Kashmir. As stated by Nyla Ali Khan

³⁶ Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, n.34, p.340.

Ironically, women in J&K have not yet joined riches in the upper echelons of decision making bodies – political, religious or social. Asymmetrical gender hierarchies legitimized by the forceful dissemination of fundamentalist and militarized discourses portend the debasement and prostration of women. Kashmiri society needs to recognize the terror caused by such predatory discourses that swoop down on the vulnerable, devouring their ideological and experiential strengths. The retrieval of the strength that nurtured the rich experiential content of the teachings of mystic poet Lalla-ded, the conviction of the women volunteers of WSDC, the vision of women activist who were harbingers of change in the sociopolitical and cultural realm, would facilitate the recomposition of women's roles in the significant process of nation-building.³⁷

Hence, the Kashmiri women's identity is shaped under the guidance and supervision of patriarchy and religion. The traditional role ascription is emphasized by the justification of gender hierarchy. The women in Kashmir have always acted to serve the demands of the times and circumstances and have shown the spirit to rise to the occasion. The courage displayed by illiterate women against the Dogra rule in 1931, the nerves to take on the Quit Kashmir movement in 1946-47 to a higher level by their dynamic participation and activism and the general fearlessness shown by the women of Kashmir have not won them the due credit and the well-deserved leadership role in shaping the future or destiny of Kashmiri society. Despite the considerable rise in the level of consciousness among the women of Kashmir during various popular upsurges, their reversal to the four walls of house in normal circumstances took no time. Gender relations and gender roles defined by patriarchy still run the show in Kashmir.

³⁷ Nyla Ali Khan, *Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir : Between India and Pakistan*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2009 , p.123.

*CONFLICT AND WOMEN:
A GENERAL
UNDERSTANDING*

CHAPTER II:

CONFLICT AND WOMEN: A GENERAL UNDERSTANDING

Camilo Cienfuegos, a much-loved hero of the Cuban revolution, is pictured on Cuba's blue 20-peso banknote. When you hold it up to the light, the face of Celia Sanchez appears behind him. Although she is a famous revolutionary heroine in her own right, and widely believed to be Fidel Castro's most trusted adviser until her death, Celia is invisible until the light shines through the banknote. One way to classify the literature on gender and conflict is to divide it, into that which makes women's and girl's experience of conflict visible by holding it up to the light; and that which analyses the different gender roles that emerge in conflict, the changing concepts of masculine and feminine identities, and changes in the power relationships between men and women.³⁸

There are two dimensions of conflict with respect to women. One, the peculiar effect of conflict on women make their experiences differ from that of men and secondly, the capacity of conflict to alter the gender roles and gender relations. Men and women differ in their conditions, roles, experiences, fears and anxieties in a conflict situation and to address them, their proper understanding is of utmost importance. Moreover, new propositions and combinations emerge in conflicts that need to be taken account of. The analysis of a conflict fails to give the complete picture if men are considered its central and sole actors and the policies and programmes are designed around this assumption.

The nature of conflicts, as these manifested in the history of world, has changed. The modern day conflicts are quite different from the way these were reflected even half a century ago. Most conflicts in the present age are internal in origin, have the involvement of same ethnic groups, challenge the sovereignty of the nation state and tear apart the social setup of the places of their occurrence. Conflicts

³⁸ Martha Thompson, 'Women gender and conflict: Making the connections, *Development in Practice*, Volume 16, Number 3 & 4, June 2006, Routledge Publishing.

vary in nature, causes, intensity and length at different places in the world. The conflicts, in recent times, invariably turn violent and adversely affect civilian populations of the regions where they take place. Many term, “the change in the nature of conflict as paradigm shift from wars of conventional nature to sub conventional conflicts, ranging from intra-state conflicts to global terrorism.”³⁹

One of the major impacts of the changes that have taken place in the nature of conflict is the implications of conflict for the people in general. In more than one way, people are at the Centre of conflicts now not merely as uninvolved victims caught up in the situation externally created by the state but many a times as fully engaged both in the context and outcome of conflict. The modern day conflicts being fought more within the state rather than between the states, the implications of conflict for people are direct. Both as victims of conflict or as the actors and agents, they are at the centre of it.

Though both men and women suffer in armed conflicts but there is specificity attached to the way women experience it. This specificity is caused by the presence of gender norms and patriarchal practices in society. This is despite the fact that women do not constitute a homogenous category of gender. They display a lot of heterogeneity on accounts of class, caste, religion, age, education, ethnicity and place of residing. Nevertheless, many commonalities can be discovered so far as the impact of armed conflict on women is concerned.

Power deprivation at all levels and an enhanced vulnerability make conflict's impact harder on women. As has been brought out by many researches from different parts of world as also in South Asia, women are subject to severe victimization in conflict situation. As a study conducted on behalf of UN notes:

Recent Wars, ranging from those in the former Yugoslavia, to Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nepal and Afghanistan as well as other conflict zones, were marked by significant violence against

³⁹ Manekshaw paper, 'Changing Nature of Conflict: Trends and Responses', *Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, Knowledge World Publishers, New Delhi, 2010, p.1

women and girls. It is estimated that 70 percent of non-combatant casualties in recent conflicts were mostly women and children. Upto half a million women were raped in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. Some 60,000 women were raped in the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and from 1991 to 2001 an estimated 64,000 incidents of war-related sexual violence against women and girls occurred in Sierra Leone. The bodies of women and girls have become battleground not necessarily, for bombs and shells, but for the callous human hands and minds of armed militia and their associates, and for those who take advantage of the chaos of war to inflict violence on the most vulnerable members of their communities.⁴⁰

Apart from direct impact of conflict that women suffer, there are various other impacts on various other accounts like loss of family members, loss of livelihood, sometimes loss of the place of inhabitation i.e. displacement, etc. The physical and emotional turmoil faced by women in conflict situation is enormous. Nearly 80 percent of refugees and IDPs (Internally Displaced People) all over the world are formed by women. “Although war has always victimized non-combatants, contemporary armed conflict exploits, aims and kills civilian more callously and systematically than ever before ... Not only does a mandate exist to address the pressing issues of the impact of conflict on women and girls but a moral obligation exist as well.”⁴¹

In a conflict situation, women are victimized due to their vulnerability by different institutions like religious Institutions, state, government, etc. Paradoxically, the conflict situation further increases their vulnerability. They are subjected to exploitation both from outsiders as well as their own people. Access to basic amenities in the conflictual circumstances affects mainly the women. Different sectors

⁴⁰ Rachel Mayanja, ‘Armed Conflict and Women, - 10 years of Security Council Resolution 1325’, *UN Chronicle*.

⁴¹ United Nations Population Fund, ‘The Impact of conflict on Women and Girls- A UNFPA strategy for Gender Mainstreaming in Areas of conflict and Reconstruction, p.3<http://www.unfpa.org/public/publications/pid/3150>

of society like education, healthcare, general economy and social life suffer in the places where conflict takes place and the women are largely disadvantaged in such situations. Moreover, they suffer due to death or forced disappearance of male members of family who happen to be primary breadwinners. The gravest atrocities inflicted on women concern the violation of their human rights especially, their sexual exploitation. The victimization of women in conflict situation gets coupled by their sufferings at the hands of patriarchy which is perpetually present in almost all societies of the world. "Not only are women living in conflict situations in the region victims of patriarchal structures that are found in most societies in the world, but caste and religious practices that are peculiar to the subcontinent."⁴²

The impact of conflict differs for different categories of women depending upon their placement in society. To present a full range of impacts and experiences of conflict on women, one has to refer to the variety of positions occupied and circumstances of women in society. Though gender as a factor never ceases to operate but as Rajasingham argues that there is different effect on women depending on their religion, caste, class, ethnicity, location, political affiliation etc. But as she argues:

... conflict also reveals a certain commonality in women's experience. They particularly experience gendered form of violence, such as rape, body searches and fear of sexual violence, as well as social stigma which dogs women who have been raped. Moreover, the fear of sexual violence that the situation of insecurity in armed conflict entails, limits and inhabits most women's mobility and hence their livelihoods, choices and realities.⁴³

Conflict inflicts some immediate and some long term effects on women particularly. There is frequent employment of violence and exploitation against women in situations of war and conflict. This leads to their sufferings, alienation and

⁴² Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake, 'Between Reality and Representation: Women's Agency in War and Post-Conflict Sri Lanka', *Cultural Dynamics*, 2004, 16 (2/3) pp.141-168, p.142

⁴³ Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake, 'Ambivalent Empowerment: The Tragedy of Tamil Women in Conflict', in Rita Manchanda (ed.) *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2001, pp.105-106.

physical as well as emotional trauma. As traditionally acclaimed caretakers, women need to keep their families together and run their households when the culturally prescribed breadwinners of the house, men in the family, are engaged in movement or are not able to support the family. New responsibilities make them vulnerable to more abuses and exploitation. Conflict disturbs the daily lives of people as also the routines associated with them. The unpredictable surroundings deeply affect the women whose dependence on the social system is maximum.

However, the most crucial suffering of women during conflict situation is the violence that they have to face. Violence against women takes many forms but the most rampant form is of sexual violence. Conflict situations are replete with the instances of sexual harassment, abuses and rapes. In such a situation, women's bodies are perceived as objects over which a community and their men have ownership rights. The abuse of those objects has the capacity to bring pain and humiliation to their owners and masters. So, the bodies of women turn into war zones over which the rivals fight their war. Acts of sexual violence against women are performed to bring humiliation to the men, they are related to. There have been evidences of rise of rapes as weapon of war in many conflicts all over the globe. Ruth Seifert has accounted the phenomenon of rape in conflict situation by giving three reasons. Once the war gets over, women are included in the proceeds of war that are distributed by men amongst themselves. The unabated violence against women continues for few months before it finally gets subsided. Secondly, rape is used to bring disgrace to both women and the men related to them. The men related to women are humbled by the fact that their women have been violated by other men and they are not capable of saving them. The third reason extended for using the strategy of rape, especially gang rape and systematic rape, against women is that of widening fellow feeling amongst themselves by victorious men or soldiers and it is allowed by the officers also.⁴⁴

Ironically, though women are subject to rapes, torture, sexual violence and humiliation by men of rival group, they are left to face the stigma and discrimination at the hands of their own people. Despite the fact that women are sexually exploited

⁴⁴ Ruth Seifert, *War and Rape: analytical Approaches*, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1993, pamphlet pp. 1- 25

owing to their membership to a particular community, the community fails to own them afterwards. Many a times, to bring humiliation to the entire community, the weapon of mass rape is used. So, in a systematic effort rape is used so frequently in conflict situations. Deliberate attempt to spread terror in community and subjugate the pride of its members is made by assaulting its women.

The whole discourse around rapes and sexual exploitation emphasizes upon the objectification of women in conflict situation. The belief that mass rape is part of the genocide, humiliation and destruction of the “enemy” stems from a patriarchal construction of a women’s body as symbolizing the territory or “property” of the enemy which has to be violated.”⁴⁵ Rape on one hand, brings out the vulnerability and powerlessness of women and on the other, hits at the dignity of women. Apart from social stigma, the occurrence of rapes is extended as a reason to put restrictions on women. Once the vulnerability of women gets exposed, society turns extra protective towards them. As a result, conservative tendencies of society get on work and women are subject to all kinds of restrains. They are put under greater male gaze.

Sexual Violence against women takes many forms in conflict situation like trafficking of women and forced sexual labour. In this case, women and girls are abducted to be transferred to places where they are pushed to provide their labour or services at domestic or industrial and even sexual fronts. The destruction of resources and the poverty caused by the conflict situation and war encourages the phenomenon of trafficking in society. The sexual exploitation of women has been very aptly described by a report namely, *Women, War, Peace : The Independent Experts Assessment on the impact of Armed Conflict on Women and the Role of Women in Peace building* covering 14 conflict areas in Africa the Middle East, South America, Asia and Eastern Europe. The report states, “... during armed conflicts, women often experience violence, forced pregnancy, abduction, sexual abuse and slavery. Their bodies have been used as “envelopes” to send messages to the perceived enemy.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Anuradha M.Chenoy, *Militarism & Women in South Asia*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002, p.28.

⁴⁶ United Nations Development Fund for women (UNIFEM), ‘Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts’ Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and the Role of Women in Peace Building’, Progress of the World’s Women, 2002, Vol.1 http://www.saynotoviolence.org/sites/default/files/mediakit_eng_0.pdf.

Since conflict involves inflicting terror on the rival force, the masculine or feminine identity acts as a factor in determining the response of the combatants in conflict situations. In such situations, “the instruments with which the body is abused in order to break the spirit tend to be gender differentiated and in the case of women, to be sexualized.”⁴⁷

The impact of conflict on women goes much beyond their sexual exploitation. There are some major violations of human rights in the conflict which happen due to displacement, death of male members, loss of employment opportunities due to disturbed circumstances, destroying of overall economic conditions, prolonged shut downs, resultant effect on education and health services. Due to prolonged curfews it becomes extremely difficult for women to carry on their lives smoothly. Referring to varied implications of conflict situation on women, Manchanda notes:

It is a truism that in the modern forms of organized political violence, women are the worst sufferers. Women are victims of the physical and psychological violence of dislocation, fragmentation of families, loss of children and men, and the predatory masculinity and misogyny of war, rape and murder. Women experience the economic violence of conflict even before its physical outbreak. Militarization entails a diversion of scarce resources from the social sectors of greatest concern to women. The disruption of armed conflict makes the socially assigned responsibility of women to feed and care for the children and the aged, all the more difficult. While the men go underground and join the militias, it is the women who remain in the home, unless forced to flee. Indeed, for women the negotiation with conflict begins after the bombs stop falling. Conflict produces women

⁴⁷ Cynthia Cockburn, ‘The Gendered Dynamics of Armed Conflict and Political Violence’, in Caroline O.N Moser & Fiona C.Clark (ed.s) *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors, Gender, Armed Conflict & Political Violence*, Zubaan , New Delhi, 2001, p.22

headed households in a patriarchal society where women are structurally and socially disadvantaged.⁴⁸

Women feel less able to control their lives in such conditions and hence, more vulnerable to the situations. The movement of men is constrained in conflict situation and there is rise of unemployment amongst them. So the women need to leave their shelter and gain some paid work to keep going their families. The unexpected and unintentional turnaround in the duties performed by men and women has the ability to shake the constancy of relations within the family and challenges the safety of women as well. Uncertain about their position and significance in the family and upset over their vulnerability and feeling of incapacity, men tend to become more aggressive and affirm their status in family by adopting violent methods. As a result there is an increase in the rate of violence against women in conflict torn societies. Death or disappearance of male members of the family bring specific troubles for women as the whole responsibility of running the household, looking after the children and old age family members comes on women. Carrying these responsibilities in situations of conflict and violence turns all the more difficult.

Conflicts are more often accompanied by displacements. The displacement leads to peculiar difficulties for women, though it is not easy for males either. As per a report,

Around the world, 40 million people- an estimated 80 percent of whom are women and children- have fled their homes because of armed conflict and their human rights violations. Some 25 million have been forced to flee but remain within their own nations and are considered 'Internally Displaced Persons'... As of 2001, an estimated 13.5 million people were displaced internally in Africa, 4.5 million in Asia and the Pacific, 3.6 million in Europe, 2.2 million in the Americas and 1.5 million in the Middle East. In

⁴⁸ Rita Manchanda, 'Where are the Women in South Asian Conflicts' in Rita Manchanda (ed.) *Women, War and Peace in South Asia*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.18.

addition there are 3.9 million refugee and internally displaced Palestinians who live in camps and receive aids from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).⁴⁹

Numerous studies in this direction leads to the conclusion that the displacement is able to bring severe implications to the women out of their loss of homes, livelihood, employment opportunities and settled social institutions. Destroyed educational and health services and the added burden due to practices prevalent in refugee camps add to the woes of the women. Lack of private space, disturbed familial environment, new social set up and other emotional issues associated with displacement bring hardships for womenfolk of displaced community. Old women are particularly affected due to so much of turbulence associated with displacement which they have to witness at the fag end of their lives. “During the process of displacement, women and men deal in different ways with terror, trauma and uprooting, renegotiate diverse aspects of their identities, rebuild social networks at a dissimilar scale and reformulate sometimes divergent hopes.”⁵⁰

Displacement is a serious misfortune as the promise of certainty and security is grim in surrounding circumstances. Being the caretakers of the family, women need to support their family members, support the economic conditions of the house, need to take care of the trauma inflicted children or other members of family and try to bring back, the various dimensions towards the normal in their lives. Lack of basic goods and facilities constrain their every effort to normalcy and increase their burden too. For example, a number of Tamils live in pathetic living conditions in the camps in both Sri Lanka and South India. There is scarcity of resources and the general surroundings are unhealthy for a decent living which makes the danger of diseases and contagion a high possibility.⁵¹

⁴⁹ United Nations Development Fund for women (UNIFEM), n. 46

⁵⁰ Donny Meertens, ‘The Nostalgic Future : Terror Displacement and Gender in Colombia’, ‘in Caroline O.N Moser & Fiona C Clark (ed.s) *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors, Gender, Armed Conflict & Political Violence*, Zubaan , New Delhi, 2001, p.134

⁵¹ Anuradha M. Chenoy, n. 45, p.114.

The patriarchal setup which assigns private space to women and public sphere to men, all over the world, experience a setback in conflict situation as women turn into providers and men are left to look after the home and hearth. This leads to feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction in men as the situational changes are not matched by the change in creed that has been so gender specific. In spite of turning into providers, the women do not necessarily come out of patriarchal frame and the position of women within house as also in society remains inferior to men only. Referring to a study in displaced community, Judy El-Bushra notes:

Women are bearing the main financial burden of providing for the family while men are being forced into taking on responsibility for children and domestic chores. However, this gender role reversal has not been accompanied by an ideological shift and for the most part women's status outside (and even, in many cases, within) the household remains subordinate to that of men. Men appear to be experiencing more difficulty than women adjusting to the new situation. Patriarchal norms underpinning gender identity are at the heart of the problem as they not only aggravate men's sense of failure and frustration but also allow men and women to be used as pawns in the pursuit of thinly disguised political objectives.⁵²

Conflict situations have the capacity to inflict a number of hardships on womenfolk. Lack of proper healthcare, particularly related to reproductive health of women, is a fact which is so pertinently visible in conflict situations. Women suffer in this regard due to lack of proper nutrition, lack of access to birth control measures, proper healthcare, treatment and medicines. Due to powerless positioning of women in society, they are subject to all kinds of sexual offences and treatments at the hands of rival parties and even their own men. The availability of healthcare products and services also gets affected in conflict situations as the whole social setup remains disturbed which further make matters worse for women. The extra needs of women,

⁵² Judy El Bushra, 'Fused in Combat: Gender relations and armed conflict', *Development in Practice*, Vol.13, Numbers 2 & 3, May 2003, pp.255. ISSN0961-45 24 print/ISSN 1364-9213 online 020252-14

due to the whole phenomenon of reproduction attached with them, are not met putting them in more danger. As per a UNFPA report:

Essential services such as basic health care, including reproductive health care and counseling are often disrupted or become inaccessible during conflict situations. This compounds health risks for all affected populations, at times when public health needs soar.... Gender plays a significant role in determining which people are most likely to become infected with STIs, including HIV/AIDS. Armed conflict increases the rate of new infections across affected populations, but women and girls are significantly more likely to become infected than men and boys. A recent conflict study in Africa found that the HIV-infection rate of adolescent girls was four times that of adolescent boys. Rape, high risk behaviours, the inability to negotiate safe sex and sexual exploitation are risks that have disproportionately impacted women and girls.⁵³

The violence against women in conflict situations extend to the socio-cultural spheres also. Imposition of various restrictions on freedom and mobility of women in the name of culture and religion adds to the sufferings of women. The discrimination and prejudices against women get enhanced during conflict. Hence, gender as a factor works in a major way in determining the behaviour and treatment towards people in conflict situation. As Rita Manchanda notes:

In violent conflict, cultural violence against women gets magnified. Various cultural taboos are introduced against women and they are forced to step back into the four walls of domesticity and face various limitations on their freedom. It is seen as in the campaign to veil women.⁵⁴

⁵³ United Nations Population Fund, n.41, p.3.

⁵⁴ Rita Manchanda, n.48, p.72

WOMEN IN CONFLICT: CHALLENGING MEN'S CENTRALITY

In viewing the role or place of women in conflict situation, there has been a tradition of following the victimhood discourse. In doing so, they are generally viewed as related to men or society as mothers, as wives or as running households or as refugees, as victimized souls, etc. But, there is much more to that about women in conflict. They have been able to transcend victimhood to emerge as actors in society. Actually, conflict has the tendency to give different exposure to women as the whole public space that otherwise is unavailable to them, opens up. Women have been restricted to private sphere as the public sphere has always been subject to male monopolization. While conflict shrinks the public space for men due to its increased danger quotient and they get pushed to private sphere, the same space gets available to women as the existence of family comes into question. As noted by Manchanda:

Violent conflict opens up for women the public sphere predominantly controlled by men. As the security forces and armed groups spread institutional terror, civil society is suppressed and the public sphere of men collapses. Men literally and metaphorically retreat into the private sphere, traditionally the domain of women. In these conditions when organization of survival becomes critical, men often have to abdicate their roles and female management of survival assumes crucial importance.⁵⁵

Conflict situation actually gives sufficient space to women to beat the stereotypes. Gender stereotyping is the process whereby men and women are ascribed fixed characteristics and images. Such gender stereotyping is done while assigning roles and duties to men and women in society and while assessing their position. Following such stereotyping, women are put in the block of victims and are seen in a passive manner in conflict. However, as the real conflict situations reveal women assume quite an active role in conflict situations and play an important part in all aspects of conflict. According to a UNFPA report,

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.15

For women, armed conflicts involve painful paths of dramatic changes and learning, where living occurs between traumas and new perceptions. Conflicts challenge women's survival capabilities and strategies, yet their capabilities and contributions, both during war and post conflict reconstruction, are not fully appreciated. There is a strong tendency to present women as suffering victims. The mass media present conflict and refugee situations through images specifically of women, children and old people, who are given assistance mostly by women. This presents a message of men heroically defending community interests and women as victims and caretakers. No attention is given to other factors: that women shoulder the economic and psychological burdens of their families, that they play foremost roles in supporting their communities and that they play extraordinary roles in peace-building and reconciliation.⁵⁶

The activities of women in conflict situation range from forging survival strategies to acting as combatants in the conflict situation. So far as the coping up with the circumstances is concerned, the women, due to their primary responsibility of looking after the household, assume the obligation to perform economic and social duties of the house. They need to get involved in same earning activities and for the purpose, have to learn new skills, take up jobs, display entrepreneurship and generate some income for running their households. For achieving all this, the women display more independence, both physically and financially. They need to head the household which makes them take charge of everything leading to creation of more public space for them and hence, further to their emancipation. In the course of all these happenings, many restrictions and patriarchal practices and norms tend to get dissolved and a sort of transformation in the gender structures starts taking place which in turn bring lots of changes in the lives of women. In a report, namely, 'Women's Empowerment arising from Violent Conflict and Recovery', a study of life stories of women from four conflict torn countries of Colombia, Indonesia, Philippines and Sri Lanka has been done by Patti Petesch for USAID. As per the report:

⁵⁶ United Nations Population Fund, n.41, p.102

The life stories reveal that conflict and recovery, while bringing great suffering, also presented new opportunities for many women as traditional local structures, livelihoods, and gender norms were disrupted. During periods of violence, many women helped their households cope by diversifying and intensifying their economic activities. In the aftermath, they often continued to play more active economic roles as they struggled to recover and rebuild. In some cases, effective post-conflict reconstruction and development interventions created new opportunities for women to improve their livelihoods, access finance, join new groups and more rarely become politically engaged. In these ways, women often gained more independence and contributed actively to the recovery of their families and communities.⁵⁷

It is very interesting to note that the very essentialism under which women are seen as nurturers, caretakers and private beings push them to innovate in the space available to them to come up with ways and means for the survival of their family members and their own. Their characteristic of holding no strong or powerful position pave way for their movement to look for the men related to them in prisons or detention centres. They negotiate with officials while searching for their family members and it seems non-threatening to anybody because of their gender only. So, surprisingly their personal space assumes public face in a very subtle manner.

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The conflict situations provide opportunities to the women to display their agency in myriad manners. However, the traditional approach to the study of implications of conflict on women focused mostly on the victimhood of women. As per this approach, the agency in conflict situation mainly laid in men and women were

⁵⁷ Patti Petesch, 'Women's Empowerment arising from Violent Conflict and recovery', (USAID) US Agency for International Deveolopment, 2011, p.i.http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/.../Petesch_Women_and_Conflict.pdf

seen mainly as mute recipients of this situation and that too mostly as victims. It is true that women are disproportionately victimized during the conflict situation, however an over emphasis on the victimhood status of women not only under-represents the reality of women but make their agency obscure. As the newly emerging knowledge on gender and conflict studies makes it clear the instability in environment of a conflict ridden society enhances capability of women to be in decision making position and hence using their agency. As Darini notes

The focus on women as “victims” of war and patriarchal culture has also arguably resulted in the elision of how long term social upheaval might have also transformed women’s often subordinated gender roles, lives and positions in non-obvious ways. At the same time, in secular feminist analysis women’s political violence is often the uncomfortable black hole within which women’s agency, because it is violent, is explained as a male patriarchal project... Likewise, it is argued that civilian women who take on new roles such as heads of households, principal income generators and decision makers in the absence of their men folk, are in reality merely carrying a double burden. While there is little doubt that women in a wars interregnum carry a double burden, viewing women as merely victims of their culture, war and patriarchy elides women’s agency in violence.⁵⁸

In interpreting the status of women as victims in conflict, they are projected as passive and dependent entities while how so much men retreat from the scene, they are always viewed as holding the control. There has been an inclination in the system to grade women as victims while viewing men as saviors. The reason for it can be traced to a fascination for victimhood status of women. The women are considered so frail that men are considered indispensable to protect them. For that matter, it is because of this reason that discrete women’s identity has not been able to evolve. It has been defined by Naomi Wolf as victim feminism where misery, grief, pain and oppression of women become appealing. Notably, the women as victims have more

⁵⁸ Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake, n.43, pp.111.

takers in the shape of mass media and government as well as non-government agencies. Hence, women are liberated of the responsibility to do something of their own condition as also the society to do something about it.

The agency of women gets displayed more prominently when they involve themselves in the movement in more than one way. They may provide the support services to the men involved in the movement by providing food and shelter to them or may get involved in the conflict directly by being informers, by helping in movement of arms or men or by directly being combatants. Researches at various places have found women acting as militants in armed struggles. The reasons for women's agency in active role vary from personal conviction to the armed struggle for achieving the objectives of the movement, identifying with the community in which struggle is taking place, loss of some near or dear in the conflict to trauma and sufferings inflicted on the self. But, whatever the reasons, even the active agency of women in conflict situation has the tendency to dilute patriarchal controls over them and making space for their contribution to the struggle and acknowledge their presence in the society. Involvement of women in direct combat situations also challenges the ascription of role of women that are considered gender proper. While challenging the theorizing about the conflict that put men in the middle and women on the fringes, what gets challenged are the real life situations. In the process of women using their active agency, the structure and practices promoting inequalities between men and women get challenged. The phenomenon also highlights the extent of autonomy gained by women in conflict situation. It also puts light on strategic importance of women in conflict. Hence,

An important dimension of the relationship between women and conflict is women's involvement with combatant forces. Women are found among combatants as forced participants (often as a result of abduction), as dependent 'followers' of fighters, in supporting roles assisting fighters but not carrying weapons, as 'shields' for combatants, and as active combatant soldiers. Women and girls may

have multiple roles among fighting forces – at times domestic servant, cook sexual partner, porter, guard, informant and soldier.⁵⁹

It is beyond doubt that women constitute a lesser partner of the violent activism. Men's domination in the combat fields is a fact all over the world. The traditional logic extended in this regard is the one that connects peace with women and war with men. But as the understanding of the present day conflict shows, there is sufficient presence of women along with men as combatants. Women's presence in fighting cadres is therefore, something that cannot be denied. "Women make up a third of the combatants in the Maoist insurgency in Nepal and the Somalia conflict. Women in Rwanda and the LTTE in Sri Lanka have been perpetrators in the ethnic/communal attacks and massacres of women and children."⁶⁰ It is with regard to such like situations that women's agency in armed struggle is a direct challenge to patriarchal ascription of gender roles.

However, the discovery of women's agency does not stop with their direct involvement in armed struggle. Conflict is commonly perceived as an utterly negative phenomenon but, it also provides avenues to women for gaining independence. Women can gain autonomy and discover newer ways to form identity as also display leadership in conflict situations. In this manner, conflict has the capacity to act as a positive factor. But, such avenues also come with a cost. The patriarchy as an overarching philosophy never ceases to exist in society. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan states that "Women's agency can neither be viewed as an abstraction, nor celebrated as an unqualified good. Agency is never to be found in some pure state of violation or action, but is complexly imbricated in the contradictory structures of patriarchy."⁶¹

While focusing on the complexity of conflict situation, the agency of women gets reflected at various levels. Along with the visibility of women's agency in their

⁵⁹ United States Agency for International Development (USAID), n.2, p.5.

⁶⁰ Rita Manchanda, n.48, p.16

⁶¹ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post Colonialism*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2004, p 11

direct involvement in armed struggle, it can also be seen in other situations which are corollary of the conflict – for instance, women use their agency when they are forced to lead the households in the absence of men, similarly one can find the agency of women when they resist militarism, it can also be located in the daily struggles of women for challenging the ascribed gender roles. Sometimes conflict gives the opportunity to women to do things that are not allowed in normal circumstances. Giving an example of challenging such role ascription, Darini has shown in case of Sri Lanka that how women choose deliberately not to dress in approved manner or being detested on losing husband and son to conflict. In a way, they challenge the way they are seen as related to some male member and assert their independent status. So, in a conflict situation, women can step out of the mould framed exclusively for them to ensure their allegiance to eternal subjectivity. As noted by Darini,

A generation of young Tamil War widows who have been displaced to and in the border areas for many years seem to be increasingly challenging conventional Hindu constructions of widowhood as a negative and polluting condition which bars their participation in many aspects of community life. Several young widows working in Vavuniya town but resident in the camp displayed their sense of independence by wearing the red pottu, the auspicious mark reserved for the married Hindu women, despite being widow or women whose husbands had abandoned them. Likewise in Batticaloa several women who had lost husbands to death, displacement or family fragmentation in the course of armed conflict and flight from bombing and shelling, increasingly refused to erase the signs of sumangali, particularly the auspicious red pottu they wore when married. They refused to be socially and culturally marginalized and ostracized because they lacked husbands and children.... As they struggle with new gender roles and identities, many of these young widows also struggle to find a language and cultural idiom to speak of their changed roles. They refuse to wear the prescribed garb of widowhood and appear to break with the ideology of Kanaki

(Paththini) the exemplary faithful, wife and widow of Tamil mythology and ideology.⁶²

So, essentially stereotypical images of women as victims and men as actors get blurred when the women's activism is focused upon. Women draw their strategies depending upon the social setting and the resources available to them. Cultural or social construction of gender depends upon the time, location, society and traditions and so the agency, too, assumes varied forms. Acting from the places where they are located, women innovate to turn their non-political and private stances into the subjects of agency. As Darini says, "it is the unsung civilian women who daily struggle to sustain their families and themselves who have the potential to be agents of structural social transformation."⁶³

Another dimension of agency which can be seen as an extension of private sphere into public domain is through the use of gender-typical roles for demanding the attention towards some issue of public importance. When women lose husbands, sons, or any other member of the family, they perform all the acts of grief and mourning in public to draw the attention towards private plight that is the result of a public issue. Such acts throw an altogether new face of agency into view which could be inactive and not using some powerful political mechanism to assert but at the same time, is quite powerful and meeting the purpose. As Manchanda notes

Women's strategies of protest often use the symbol of mourning and motherhood both for moral authority and political mobilization.... It is a reminder that for the disempowered, agency can be passive. Private sorrow becomes politicized when it is taken into public space as in the strategy of the Mothers Front or the Women in Black. The creative anarchy, the sporadic nature, the non-hierarchical and non-conventional forms which mark women's

⁶² Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake, n.43, p.127.

⁶³ Ibid, p.122-123..

initiatives, challenge traditional notions of what political action should and can be about.⁶⁴

The phenomenon of occupation of public space by mothers turns into powerful political tool of displaying resistance and gaining independence. As the traditional hierarchy is not disturbed, the women are showing their customary concerns and emotions, the local ethos are reinforced and are shown as entrenched with compassion, such exhibition of agency has always been granted by society. Moreover, even women gain their portion of political mileage in the process. Appealing to the characteristics associated traditionally with mothers like love, compassion, care etc., the politics of motherhood or 'political motherhood' (term coined by Jennifer Schirmer) as per Pnina Werbner,

is a process of unfolding consciousness, as women progressively move into the public sphere.... The power of motherist peace or philanthropic movements is, first, that the women who lead them capture the moral high ground by virtue of their public display of compassion, generosity and a sense of justice. Second, their mixed agendas and embedded ness in local traditions enable them to mobilise ordinary women on a vast scale. Third, they attain a measure of autonomy and influence through their fund raising activities or through international support from women's networks. Perhaps most important of all, such women dare to cross class boundaries to acquaint themselves personally with the sufferings of women and children (and sometimes men) beyond their everyday world. All these factors increase their ability to influence a male dominated public sphere and, as I have argued here, to introduce new values to legitimate authority into the public domain.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Rita Manchanda, n.48, pp.24-25.

⁶⁵ Pnina Werbner, 'Political Motherhood and the Feminization of Citizenship: Women's Activisms and the Transformation of the Public Sphere' in Nira Yuval Davis & Pnina Werbner (Ed.s) *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2005 pp.221-245.

Women's roles or more specifically, mother's roles in a conflict situation fall in different categories depending upon the position from which that role is assumed. The role of mother, while giving birth or caring, is locational. On the other hand, the same role assumes a tactical dimension when surrounded by politics. The politics of motherhood has been placed in a 'strategic' category by Vidyamali Samarsinghe. Referring to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, she has categorized the roles of women in conflict situation into two categories viz; Situational and Strategic. "Situational category includes private roles like life sustainer, life savers, life givers and even victimhood. Whereas strategic category includes women's role in relation to war like soldiers, martyred mothers and peace makers."⁶⁶

Women's experiences cannot be classified in one category as there are multiple manners in which women execute their activities in conflict situations. The reasons behind their actions are also varied. But, from fighters to peacemakers, from creators to destroyers, from resisters to conformers and from silent workers to most vocal ones, the range of their engagements is truly remarkable. Manchanda also notes,

Beyond the icon of Mother Sorrow, there are many faces of women in conflict in South Asia. Women have negotiated conflict situations by becoming citizens, combatants, heads of households, war munitions workers, prostitutes, producers of soldiers and war resisters and political leaders at the local and national level. In South Asia, at one end is the Woman of Violence represented by the Armed Virgin of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), at the other end is the Woman of Peace, Symbolized by the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) in the nationalist struggle for an independent Nagaland.⁶⁷

The multiplicity of women's responses affirming their agency in the state of Assam and Nagaland has been documented by Paula Banerjee. She describes how the

⁶⁶ Vidyamali Samarsinghe, 'Soldiers, Housewives and peace makers: Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka', *Ethnic Studies*, July 1996, pp.203-227.

⁶⁷ Rita Manchanda, n.48, p.11

women in these states, though marginalized in formal politics, dominate in the sporadic, non-formal political activism. Paula has highlighted an interesting phenomenon in Assam of forming sporadic groups to protest against atrocities. Drawing women from housewives agricultural labourers or students, the groups are formed in matter of hours. The protests do not sustain long and do not turn into mass movements but the women do not give up. These '10 day protests' are becoming permanent fixtures on the political scene. It is through these initiatives that women are trying to appropriate public spaces.⁶⁸

Another aspect of women's agency in armed conflict is with regard to their role in peace process. Infact, more often than not, the motherist logic is extended in support of the argument. The motherist logic relates peace with the biological or inherent nature of women i.e. women are inherently peaceful by nature. Therefore, peace, considered a part of woman's inherent nature, is seen as a field where women can actually make contributions. Initiatives and alliances by women have played a role of vital help in bringing peace in many countries of the world. They have tried to steadily increase their role in conflict resolution and peace making by insisting upon disarmament and agreeing on peace pacts. A number of organizations promoting peace or working towards the reconstruction of conflict ridden societies are run by women. But, it is very disappointing to note that so far as the formal peace processes are concerned, women are mostly left out of scene. They are highly marginalized thereby, overlooking the part played by them in bringing peace to the society. As further noted by USAID,

Nevertheless, women are usually left out of formal peacemaking activities unless they exhibit remarkable determination to seat themselves at the peace table. Despite notable progress for women over the past decade, even when they manage to play a role in peace negotiations, women tend to fade into the background when it comes to rebuilding destroyed economics and reconstructing war-torn societies. Their efforts in rebuilding social networks are viewed

⁶⁸ Paula Banerjee, 'Women in Assam and Nagaland' in Rita Manchanda (ed.) *Women, War and Peace in South Asia*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, PP.131-176

as tangential to formal mechanisms and are under reported, as data collected or peace processes is often not disaggregated by gender.⁶⁹

The United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 that was adopted on 31 October, 2000 is a landmark step towards the recognition of women's importance in a conflict situation. The resolution endorses the crucial part that women can play in the peace processes, conflict resolution, negotiations, humanitarian work and reconstruction of society in post-conflict scenario. It emphasizes the greater participation of women in all works of peace and security. The significance of Security Council resolution lies in establishing that a gender perspective needs to be incorporated in all efforts of peace and security and it presses upon all parties to do so. The resolution also insists upon paying special attention to preventing gender based violence in conflict situations, especially, rapes and molestations as also towards specific requirements of women in such situations. So, it is a document from a world body that urges the parties to the conflict to respect women's rights and appeals to all the countries to give more space to women at all levels of decision making or participation. Hence, resolution 1325 can be interpreted to impart greater agency to women in conflict situation. Though the resolution 1325 of UN Security Council necessitates the presence of women in all peacemaking efforts, the recognition of the crucial role that women could play in peace building processes in conflict torn societies is still missing. Further, where women's efforts towards peace building are still recognized in different societies, rarely have policies and programmes of international agencies, national governments or development NGOs explored how individual trauma and social suffering "push them to take on decision-making roles, entering into negotiations with conflict in the public sphere, becoming peace activists or participating in the militarised struggle. The challenge is to shore up the "gains" wrought by conflict in the experiences of both civilian and combatant women; to strengthen women as agents of social transformation".⁷⁰

⁶⁹ United States Agency for International Development (USAID), n.2, p.4.

⁷⁰ Rita Manchanda, 'Women's Agency in Peace Building: Gender Relations in Post Conflict Reconstruction, *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol.40, No.44/45 (Oct 29-Nov 4, 2005) pp. 4737-4745

If the universal binary stereotyping is to be believed, the war is invariably a part of masculine culture, the way peace flows from the feminine nature. So, peace politics is something that draws its legitimacy from the natural differentiation between men and women. Paula Banerjee notes,

Interventions for peace are largely undertaken by women. Since this falls within their traditional scope of action they do it without fear of stigmatization and also innovate within the parameters of that tradition. In the process this becomes their training ground for the public realm and it is through these forums that they acquire leadership roles in public spaces.⁷¹

As conflict and violence impact men and women differently and there is well established power differentials between men and women in society, the stakes and roles of men and women also vary in bringing peace to the society. Women bring their experience of powerlessness to the process of peace building and hence, any peace brokered by women has the capacity to be more equalitarian and inclusive so that less powerful could benefits and so, are most interested in seeking their resolutions. Woman groups adopt many traditional and newer methods to bring peace to the regions. The way women have knack for innovation where activism or active participation in conflict is concerned, they have knack for showing innovative strategies to foster peace in their respective areas. Recently, many organizations, both national and international, are insisting upon the presence of women on the negotiation tables. The argument that has been extended is that any peace that involves women could possibly by a sustained one. Moreover, women face the worst of impacts that a conflict situation could put on a society, not to forget the making of peace process a democratic one. As per a UN report,

The participation of women and girls and the inclusion of gender perspectives in both formal and informal peace processes are crucial

⁷¹ Paula Banerjee, n.68, p.168

in the establishment of sustainable peace. Women cannot voice their concerns if they are not consulted by fact finding missions or if they are not involved in peace negotiations. Political structures, economic institutions and security escorts negotiated in peace talks will not facilitate gender equality between women and men if gender dimensions are not considered in these discussions.⁷²

Though proving their well-deserved agency in Peace-Politics, there is sheer lack of women in formal political scene. Politics is all about power play and power in society lies with men. So despite the fact that women perform all the activities in conflict that can be categorized as political, they are not considered party to any formal process involved in the situation. Women constitute largest group facing severest of implications of conflict in more than one ways. But their experiences are hardly paid the deserved and desired heed. As Manchanda notes,

Women forge survival strategies, build dialogue, co-existence and reconciliation at the grass roots level, but get marginalized when formal politics takes over at the negotiating table.... Patriarchal structures which exclude women from formal politics predicate that their experience of negotiating conflict and maintaining survival is not recognized as a significant resource either nationally or internationally. The challenge is to tap and consolidate the myriad spontaneous and sporadic women's initiatives in the informed space of politics and facilitate access to resources to enable women to negotiate formal structures of power.⁷³

The coming of peace to the society means reversing to the pre-conflict situation. But, from the perspective of women, it may never be meant returning to status quo. The stronghold of societal norms on women undergoes change during conflict thereby leading to transformation in established institutions and processes that

⁷² United Nations, 'Women, Peace and Security', *United Nations Publications*, 2002, p.53 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf>

⁷³ Rita Manchanda, n.48, pp.26-27

are gender specific. So, only that peace which does not push women into pre-conflict patriarchal setup could be a real peace. It should never be a situation where women are disempowered and pushed back to four walls of house.

So, all the efforts towards reconstruction of conflict torn societies should not instigate revivalist tendencies that seek the traditional gender roles and gender relations prevail in post-conflict situation. However, that does not mean that prolonging the conflict situation remains in the interest of women, but to argue on the contrary that the advantage that women have achieved during conflict situation should not be reversed, once peace is established.

Violent conflict should certainly not be seen as a preferred pathway to women's empowerment and poverty reduction. But post conflict recovery periods can offer a rare opportunity to accelerate local development and strengthen women's agency because of the stock of conflict to local structures, including gender structures and norms and because of people's determination to rebuild their lives once peace returns.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Patti Petesch, n.57, p-2

*COMMUNITY, CULTURE
AND GENDER IN
KASHMIR*

CHAPTER III:

COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND GENDER IN KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir has a lot of diversity thereby making it a complex region. The inhabitants of the state belong to three major religions- Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. However, there is presence of other religions as well, including Sikhism, Christianity and Jainism. The population is further divided on the lines of region, culture, language, caste, ethnicity and political affiliation. Belonging to different geographical, cultural, social and historical backgrounds, there are three major regions of the state- Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The demography of the state presents a complex picture. The Kashmir region has largely been Muslim dominant except for a small population of Kashmiri Pandits who used to hold important posts and positions in administration and society and hence used to exert substantive influence in the state. However, they had to face mass exodus from Kashmir in the early period of rise of militancy and thereafter, the valley has been inhabited overwhelmingly by Muslims.

What adds to the internal intricacy of the state is the fact that beside social diversity, there are different political orientations, perceptions and identifications. These different identifications need not be understood narrowly, in the sense of identifications with political party or programme. But on the contrary, these point to the larger context of political sense of belonging. Whether understood as 'political collectives'; the 'political community'; the 'nationalist' or 'sub-nationalist' identities, these are different sense of belongings which sharply divide the people of the state.

The social diversity and political divergence within the state creates a complexity that defies any neat and clean classification of people as 'majority' or 'minority'. In fact, majority in one context becomes minority in the other. That is the reason that most of the people of the state live with a strong feeling of being in 'minority'. Hence, there are multiple minorities within the state. To quote Rekha Chowdhary:

Despite being part of the largest religious group of the state, the Kashmiri Muslims perceive themselves as a majority in the context of the larger reality of India. Their perception of marginalization emanates from the context of the relationship of the state with India,

especially the intrusion of the Centre in the politics of the state and disregard of the local political aspirations. The Hindus of Jammu and Buddhists of Ladakh, though majority in their respective regions, perceive themselves as minority not only in the context of the Muslim majority character of the state but also in the Kashmir centric political and power context of the state. The sense of deprivation and minority lies deep in many other ways- the Kashmiri Pandits perceive their minority status vis-à-vis the Kashmiri Muslims, while the Muslims of Jammu perceive their deprivation both vis-à-vis the Hindus of Jammu as well as Muslims of Kashmir. Similar is the situation of the Muslims of Kargil who perceive their marginalization both in the immediate context of the Buddhist domination in Ladakh as well as the power centre in Kashmir.⁷⁵

It is within this context of multiple perceptions of minorities within the state, that one can locate the idea of Kashmiri community. There is a clear cut conception of Kashmiri collective sense of belonging that characterizes the 'Kashmiri identity'. This identity has undergone a historical process of its formation and its assertion in more recent period is a reflection of the process of political mobilization.

To trace the process of identity formation in Kashmir from the history of the region, it is important to refer to its roots. The composite culture of Kashmir that is referred as 'Kashmiriyat' owes its roots to its historical trajectory and its transition from one religion to another. According to various historical accounts, the earliest rulers as well as populations of Kashmir were Hindus. During the rule of Ashoka in 3rd century B.C, Buddhism got introduced and expanded in Kashmir.

Besides different religions, Kashmir got exposed to different kinds of rulers. The first Muslim rule got established in Kashmir in 1339 AD with the rule of Shah Mir and after that remained under Muslim rule for a long time. The Mughal rule that began in 1589 remained till 1753 when brutal Afghan rule replaced it in Kashmir. It

⁷⁵ Rekha Chowdhary, 'Multiple Identity Politics in Jammu & Kashmir' , in Rekha Chowdhary (ed.) *Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir*, Vitasta Publications, New Delhi, p.5

was followed by equally devastating Sikh Rule from 1819 to 1846 after which the last ruling dynasty of the Dogras ruled till 1947.⁷⁶

The Treaty of Amritsar made a Dogra, Maharaja Gulab Singh, ruler of Kashmir in 1846. Till the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir gained independence in 1947, it remained under the control of Dogra rulers. Like every other princely state which was feudal in nature, the state of J&K under Dogras was also feudal and the rulers ignored the genuine needs and the conditions of the Kashmiri population. They gave free hand and extra privileges to the landlords to whom they had granted large chunks of fertile lands but subjected the common Kashmiri population to exploitative policies and worst economic regime by paying little heed to their developmental needs and growth while imposing heavy taxes and restrictions on them. The period was marked by decreasing counts of socioeconomic indicators for Kashmiri Muslims.

Maharaja Hari Singh- the last Dogra ruler of Jammu and Kashmir acquired the kingship in 1925. His rule was equally despotic and exploitative. As Khan notes:

Muslims were disallowed from owning and carrying firearms and sharp instruments. Kashmiri Muslims lived in such circumscribed conditions and under such strict surveillance that they were required to seek a license to slaughter a chicken for an ordinary meal. There was a strict ban on cow slaughter in the state. The sheep or goats that Muslims sacrificed on religious occasions were heavily taxed, transforming the existence of these people into the proverbial albatross. Most edible items saleable artifacts and ceremonial services were taxed. Kashmiri farmers worked as mere

⁷⁶ The conversion from Sikh rule to Dogra rule is also a noteworthy event. The Rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a non-Muslim rule over a, now, Muslim majority Kashmir and proved very oppressive and cruel. Raja Gulab Singh was a feudal chief in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court and was bestowed the monarchy of Jammu by Ranjit Singh in 1822. Raja Gulab Singh was an enterprising soul and soon, he expanded his control over the territories of Ladakh and Baltistan but, under the auspices of kingship of Maharaja Ranjit Singh only. The death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the subsequent infightings, factionalism and hence, the resultant insecurity amongst the Britishers towards their North-Western frontier led to the first Anglo-Sikh war in 1845. The neutrality of Raja Gulab Singh during the war won him the offer to take up the territory of Kashmir and other hilly areas from Britishers but, only after paying a meager amount of seventy five lakhs. This bestowal, under Treaty of Amritsar, is commonly perceived and quoted as "sale deed" of Kashmir wherein Dogra Ruler Gulab Singh bought the heavenly region of Kashmir and hence, doesn't leave a good impression on common Kashmiri perception.

serfs on the lands that were bestowed by the Dogra monarch on his clansmen... Muslims were denied the right to gain an education; excluded from the civil services; disenfranchised and prevented from participating in political activities without government permission.⁷⁷

However, despite being oppressed, Kashmiris were exposed to modern educational, social and political process and with these processes, the Kashmiri sense of collective and community identity was also formed. With the beginning of 20th century, many social reforms got introduced in Kashmiri society. Works of Christian missionaries and local reforms began gaining fruits. The Society felt the first touch of modernity and the first upsurge against Dogra rule began in 1931. Meanwhile, few young Kashmiri men educated outside ventured into the political scene of Kashmir. This was the time when Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, emerged as the leader of Kashmiri masses. Till that time, the religious leaders of Kashmir, occupying one or another shrine, were representing the Muslim population and they could neither politically mobilise the masses nor create a collective sense of belonging among them. To present an appropriate stage from where the Kashmiri population could air their grievances, Abdullah formed the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in 1932.

Unlike the earlier self-appointed representatives drawn from the commercial and landed elite of Srinagar, the Muslim Conference sought to build a wider base of support among the agricultural and artisan classes of the valley. Its unambiguously anti Dogra stand, demanding economic, political and religious rights from the state, had made the decrepit condition of Muslim Shrines in state possession an important symbol of Kashmiri Muslim powerlessness.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Prem Nath Bazaz, n.5, p.194.

⁷⁸ Mridu Rai, n.24, p.218.

It is this sense of powerlessness that led the mass of Kashmiris to identify with Sheikh Abdullah's politics. The formation and assertion of Kashmiri identity started with his politics.

To bring at par the struggle of Kashmiris with the political developments taking place elsewhere in India, Sheikh Abdullah sought to secularise the politics of Muslim Conference and give it a wider socio-economic content. Accordingly, the Muslim Conference was converted into All India Jammu and Kashmir National Conference in 1939.⁷⁹

The political developments that took place in Kashmir during the period between 1920s and 1947 actually set the basis of formation of Kashmiri political identity that came to be reaffirmed and reasserted in the post-1947 period. It is on the basis of this identity that the Kashmiri leadership rejected the idea of Pakistan as the homeland of Muslims and preferred to negotiate with India rather than join Pakistan. The basis of political identity was the idea of Kashmiriyat which defined the diversity and plurality of Kashmir on the one hand and its syncretic heritage on the other. It sought to emphasise liberal political values. In the political sense, it stood for autonomy, secular politics and pro-people policies.

After the accession of state of Jammu & Kashmir with India, the Indian Constituent Assembly passed Article 370 that would be guiding the relation between India and J&K. The article allowed limited relation between Union and State as only heads of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communication were given to Union to legislate upon while allowing the state to legislate on residuary subjects. Moreover,

⁷⁹ Following the demand of complete independence by the leaders of Indian Struggle for independence, Abdullah, too, launched Quit Kashmir Movement against the Maharaja in Jammu & Kashmir which led to his arrest in 1946. Granting of Independence to British India and subsequent partition of country into India and Pakistan and resultant anxiety among the rulers of princely states regarding joining either of the two dominions made the Maharaja of J&K to keep himself independent. Thereafter a tribal attack from Pakistan made the ruler release Sheikh Abdullah from prison and on his advice, accedes to India. Interestingly, National Conference began as a regional representative of Kashmiri Muslims and was in favour of ultimate fate of Kashmiri population to be in the hands of Kashmiris themselves but, it favoured the instrument of Accession to be signed in favour of India only, defying the communal affiliation with Pakistan. But, since some extraordinary events had taken place before accession, its referral to the people of Kashmir was also added as a rider to the accession by the then Governor- General Lord Mountbatten though during the attack, a big portion of the state went into Pakistan's control. Moreover, the way in which the accession took place made Pakistan challenge the very legitimacy of accession itself, thereby, staking claim over the full territory of J&K.

there was a promise on part of National Leadership to know the will of people regarding accession by holding a plebiscite in the state. Defending the arrangement, Reeta Chowdhary Trembley argues,

Through the constitution and other political arrangements, the state denies or acknowledges difference and similarities within the civil society. The acknowledgment of differences creates a political and legal space for the communities whereby they not only define themselves but can also simultaneously define their similarities and differences vis-à-vis the other... The Indian state created two legal categories in its constitution – Article 370 recognized a special status for the state of Jammu and Kashmir and reaffirmed the state subject requirements whereby employment and ownership of property were restricted to Kashmiri citizens. Through these legal categories, the Indian state simultaneously embraced and denied its differences from the Kashmiri society: it recognized the cultural and political identity of the Kashmiri population, yet it asserted that the similarities between Kashmir and the Indian state were based on the socialistic and democratic agenda of the National Conference party headed by Sheikh Abdullah and a historical cultural identity Kashmiriyat a secular tradition prevalent in the valley since the fourteenth century rule of Zain-ul-Aabdin.⁸⁰

Over the period, the concept of Kashmiri identity got ingrained into the political psyche of Kashmir and this identity has continued to inform the Kashmiri sensibilities. In this sense, this identity remains paramount and defines the politics of every kind. It is around this context of Kashmiri identity that much of internal politics of Kashmir in the post-1947 period relates.

Though in the initial post-1947 period, there was a general sense of satisfaction in Kashmir that the assertion of Kashmiri identity politics in the preceding

⁸⁰ Reeta Chowdhari Trembley, 'Nation Identity and the Intervening Role of the State: A study of the Secessionist Movement in Kashmir', *Pacific Affairs*, Concordia University, 1996, pp.486-487.

two decades had resulted in the well-being of the people, however discontent started evolving in the early fifties. The success of the National Conference government in changing the agrarian structure and passing the radical land reforms as well as initiating various progressive policies, the initiation of the process of formation of state constitution and incorporating the commitments made in the New Kashmir Manifesto into this constitution – all these led to a feeling that Kashmiri people through their political representatives were in control of their political destiny. They were therefore comfortable with Kashmir's relationship with India. The reason being that the Kashmiri nationalist sentiments and Kashmiri identity politics was harmonised with Indian nationalism and there was no contradiction between the two. Article 370 acted as a bridge between Kashmiri identity politics and the Indian nationalist goals. However, this harmonised relationship could not continue for long. Questioning of Article 370 by the rightist political organisations and parties including the RSS and Bharatiya Jana Sangh led to the friction between the Kashmiri identity politics on the one hand the Indian nationalist goals on the other.

The first jolt came with post-independence demands for complete accession and integration of the state from RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) affiliated Praja Parishad. The party had its base in Jammu region and the removal of the rule of Dogra Maharaja had left a bitter feeling among the Hindu majority Jammu region. The passing of Big Landed Estates Act also led to resentment in Jammu, particularly within the powerful landed classes who were dispossessed by the land reforms. Another reason for the resentment was the focus of the newly established Sheikh Abdullah led NC government on Kashmir and its failure to integrate Jammu's masses into its politics. As there were historical roots to the Kashmiri identity politics, its focus remained limited to Kashmir. Despite acquiring a progressive direction in late 1930s, it failed to mobilise the equally disadvantaged masses in Kashmir. Kashmiri identity politics remained limited to the confines of Kashmir. That was the reason that progressive policies that were result of Article 370 created a sense of satisfaction in Kashmir but failed to generate similar satisfaction in Jammu. In the absence of support base in Jammu, the progressive politics of NC was seen as 'pro-Kashmir' and 'anti-Jammu'. The resentment of the dispossessed classes therefore became the resentment of Jammu region. The people of Jammu were mobilised into the politics of

rejection of Article 370. The Praja Parishad agitation against Article 370 that took place in 1952 seriously questioned the purpose of two constitutions, two symbols and two PMs (ek desh mein do vidhan, do pradhan, do nishan, nahin challenge) was the slogan of the Praja Parishad agitation. Article 370 was seen as a stumbling block in the process of full integration of the state with India and demand was therefore made for abolition of Article 370 and full integration of the state with India.

The movement for full integration eventually waned away but, the anxiety and suspicion that made way into Sheikh Abdullah's mind made him challenge the finality of accession of state to India and ultimately led to his arrest in 1953. From 1956 onwards, the state witnessed the virtual installing of governments by the central government respectively. The simultaneous deterioration in the autonomous status of the state took place with passing of number of constitutional orders that diluted the original relations of the state with the Centre. In many ways, the state was brought at par with other states and therefore the special constitutional status of the state was eroded to a large extent. As stated by Chowdhary,

With emphasis being shifted from “constitutional autonomy” to “constitutional integration” as the basis of J&K's relationship with India, the logic that the Kashmiri leadership had in its preference for India was weakened. Consequently the consent that earlier was readily available for accession of the state with India was also withdrawn. With internal contestation, especially after the undemocratic detention of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the legitimacy of India's position vis-à-vis Kashmir was also impaired. It was in this context that the “national interest” assumed primary over everything else in Kashmir and everything was justified in its name whether it was the absence of democracy, suppression of civil liberties, or disregards of popular responses. The consequence has been the accumulated discontent that has been erupting from time to time.⁸¹

⁸¹ Rekha Chowdhary, ‘Kashmir in the Indian project of Nationalism’, in Nyla Ali Khan (ed.) *The Parchment of Kashmir : History, Society and Polity*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012, p.172

All the efforts towards the integration of the state with India have been seen by Kashmiri population as an attack on their distinct identity and they feel the need to reassert it to save it from further erosion. With this feeling, comes the inclination to focus on their identity and take all the steps to save it from outside forces. All the outside agencies, including the state armed forces, Indian Civil Services, Indian business class and even migrant labours coming from other states - have been looked upon with suspicion and hostility. This identity emphasizing upon community and culture has become utmost important for Kashmir. In the post-independence period, it was the overwhelming feeling of threat to their identity that has ignited the struggle in the region. Accompanied by some other factors, this struggle has assumed an explosive dimension in Kashmir. So, a movement with a separatist fervour began in 1989 in Kashmir and it has since been carrying a mass support.⁸²

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has been suffering from armed conflict from more than two decade now. It has resulted into killings of innumerable Kashmiri population, disappearances of unmatched number of people, violence including sexual violence against women and total breakdown of law and order in the region. Militants, Security personnel, counter insurgents, foreign militants all contributed their part in deterioration of conditions.

Apart from the loss to human lives, the conflict situation has resulted in deeper repercussion on the society of Kashmir. Society in general and the cultural practices in particular have been affected by prolonged situation of violence and abnormal conditions. More particularly there has been the impact of militarisation which has been both the result of the armed militancy as well as the response of the state. The culture of gun that has been prevailing not only brought about the prevalence of large number of armed, bunkers, army camps, but also overall militarised responses of the multiple agents of violence including the armed militants and counter insurgents.

⁸² Basically, both internal as well as external factors have contributed to the conflict situation in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. The external factors include the persistent hostility between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and its division between Pakistan administered Kashmir and India administered Kashmir. This factor received further impetus with the internationalization of Kashmir issue upon its reference in the United Nations. Various wars between India and Pakistan like 1947-48 war, the 1965 war, 1971 war, Kargil war and other countless incidents of firings, encroachments and other tensions represent the external dimension of the Kashmir Conflict. The internal dimension of Kashmir conflict revolves around the special status of J&K and the Centre's politics in and towards the state which has been characterized by a feeling of suspicion between state, especially Kashmir and Centre.

More particularly, there has been the masculinisation and militarisation of the society in general. The general environment of the society has so much been inflicted by the conflict and the politics surrounding it that not even a single aspect of the culture and society remained untouched by it.

Along with killings of a number of people, there has been large number of abductions, disappearances, custodial deaths, sexual violence and large number of human rights violations. Guarantee of a secure life has been lost for anybody in the valley. Rarely any family has been left without some sort of experience of violence. “Gun Culture” is the phrase that has been ascribed to the conditions in the region. ‘Culture’ is one thing that permeates every aspect of a society’s life and clubbing it with a word ‘Gun’ shows the extent of violence that has made its way into the social life of people. As Khan sums up,

The unpleasant reality in which J&K lives, one of Indian and Pakistani dominance, is marked by the overwhelming presence of paramilitary troops, barbed wire and invasive searches; dispossessed youths trained in Pakistani training camps to unleash a reign of misguided terror; custodial killings in detention centres and mothers whose faces tell tales of woe waiting outside those gloomy centres to catch a glimpse of the their unfortunate sons can exercise in futility; and burqa clad women living in fear of the wrath of fundamentalist groups as well as paramilitary forces bent on undercutting their self- respect.⁸³

As the armed violence became a way of life in Kashmir, the region also saw an erosion of traditional societal and cultural values and the introduction of various new codes, mainly imposed from above. The movement of local population begun to be integrated with the global jihad and the radicalization of society started taking place along.

GENDER IDENTITY IN KASHMIR CONFLICT

⁸³ Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, p.101.

In terms of the position of women and their freedom of mobility and their sense of empowerment, Kashmir has been quite a liberal society. In order to understand the liberal ethos of Kashmiri society vis-à-vis women, it is important to refer to Lalleshwari or Lal Ded. She along with Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani share the title of the patron saints of Kashmir. It is their spiritual discourse that has been translated into the day-to-day philosophy of life for ordinary Kashmiris. Lal Ded has always been a symbol of Kashmiri culture. Kashmiri culture's representation by Lal Ded holds importance on two accounts. Kashmiri Brahmin by birth, Lal Ded has been venerated equally by Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir. So Lal Ded is the fitting example of a culture that has synthesized the practices of Kashmiri pandits and Muslims into a common heritage. Secondly, assaulted in her marital life, Lal Ded abandoned it to rise in spiritualism. Lal Ded's rise can also be inferred as a symbol of women's liberation as she didn't accept what was served to her and dared to directly confront the society inflicted by the system of patriarchy. After the beginning of conflict, the culture of Kashmir suffered on both these accounts.

The culture of Kashmir, as noted above, has always been open and liberal to the women. The social settings and the economic compulsions required women to work and contribute to the society and that further required women to keep themselves out of veils. In the more recent period they have been getting educated and taking jobs in the public domain. Though there remained a gap between the educational and occupational profile of men and women in Kashmir, but on the whole the society had no problem with the visibility of women in the public domain, with the inter-sex mixing, mixed education and their taking up new responsibilities. But conflict changed everything in Kashmir. Women have been subject to all kinds of restrictions in the prevailing conditions. The rampant violence leading to brutalization bears the testimony to the militarization of society as also the prevalence of masculinist discourse in Kashmir. To begin with, it was the impact of spontaneous onset of militancy and mushrooming of the militant organisations which created space for those elements which had remained on the fringes of Kashmiri society till now. These fringe elements used the ascendancy of violence to impose their version of culture, religion and society on people. They drew the legitimacy from the fact that they were struggling to achieve something for the whole community and hence

dawned upon themselves the responsibility of streamlining some issues other than political and therefore the religion also began to be used in achieving political ends.

Consequently, in the new discourse that evolved, women were asked to live by the codes of religion. Emphasis was placed on sex segregation and disciplining of women's choices about their dress. Not only they were asked to veil themselves but also asked to go by strict dress code. Hence all the western dresses were banned, use of cosmetics was disallowed and beauty parlours were closed. There was a general discourse of restricting the sources of entertainment, particularly targeted were cinema theatres and video parlours.

In an atmosphere charged with politics enmeshed with religion, fundamentalist organizations got the opportunity to issue dictats and moral codes for the society in Kashmir. Though various other formal and informal commands were given by these organisations, however, what assumed prominence was the diktat of veiling. On frequent occasions, command would come from one or the other obscure organisation asking women to veil themselves. Terming it as an 'Islamic' dress, burqa was commanded to be worn by women. Interfering in the reproductive rights of woman, militant outfits issued dictates to stop using contraceptives and abortions. This was done both in the name of religion and the political identity. To quote Ramachandran:

People, especially in the villages were told that the Central Government was trying to alter the Muslim majority nature of the state and so Muslims should have more children. Besides, the armed struggle needed more fighters. The sale of contraceptives was stopped and family planning procedures were not performed, at least openly in the hospitals.⁸⁴

When the reproductive rights were denied to the women in Kashmir, simultaneously there was an appeal to the maternal emotions of the woman. "Members of the Jamaat-Islam and the Banat-ul-Islam (its woman wing) would tell

⁸⁴ Sudha Ramachandran and Sonia Jabbar, *Shades of Violence: Woman and Kashmir*, WISCOMP, New Delhi, March 2003, p.21

women that they were life givers and so should not kill the unborn children,” recalls a doctor in a government hospital”⁸⁵. The militant organizations were able to impose their will on the people, especially in the rural areas due to the availability of space left by the absence of well-established political order and the damage suffered by politics as such, from the rise of armed conflict.

The early days of militancy which brought changes in the general environment of the society were difficult to deal with. As per one respondent working in a government department:

Ours was a traditional joint family with a lot of bonding. My father was a businessman and I had two brothers and two male cousins in the family. All the boys used to go outside and enjoy even in the evenings while I had to ask my parents to visit my friends place or to stay for some extra class. That time, I used to feel so bad for such differentiation. But, it was only after the onset of militancy in the valley that I realized the freedom I enjoyed earlier. Visiting my friends during some festivity or occasion in their house or entering a corner café after college or even enjoying watching new things from the windows of the shops while walking blissfully from college to home were few things that became impossible during the period of militancy. Even a minute’s delay from the time of arrival used to invite a number of questions.

Overall, women felt the increasing control of society and pressure was exerted on them to discipline them. Not only the pressure of militant organisations but familial pressure upon them also increased. As per another respondent now married in Jammu:

My parents’ house was in downtown area. With the beginning of militancy in Kashmir, our area totally got into its influence. Nobody

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.21

was left untouched by the arousal of feelings. Every day, we listened about one or other boy of locality, even educated ones, joining militancy. Many others, who didn't join militancy, were seen vehemently supporting it and joining daily protests in city. I saw even the weakest and meekest of boys in our locality showing his strength and getting aggressive on the call for azadi. I saw boys literally changing, their life styles, their dressing, their talks and their tones. Many free minded and normal boys got radicalized and even saw to it that at least women of the locality dress up properly and adopt veil. Many parents of the locality were even instructed to look after their daughters.

Various restrictions started being imposed on women. Incidents of sexual violence as also threats to life made families curtail their freedom. Perceived threats intensified the self-imposed restrictions amongst women themselves. As per one respondent:

The air was filled with so much uncertainty and anxiety that we dared not go outside until it was necessary. We were drawn so much into pessimism that every day we expected our worst nightmares to get true. Cross firing and explosion became another name of event in Kashmir and nobody was sure of his or her safety. Even the private confines of the home could not provide the required respite.

Another respondent stated:

You cannot imagine the sense of helplessness and fear when the men of the locality were lined up outside and the security forces conduct the searches inside the houses after some militant attack nearby. All the privacy anybody enjoys at home seems vanishing and in view of the news of various incidents of rape and abuse by security forces, the crackdowns in locality generated a lot of intimidation.

As already stated, the society was never been so restrictive for the Kashmiri women. Despite being Muslim dominated the education of women has always been valued and so sanction for their free movement was readily available. Women never felt any sort of pressure on their mobility. But, militancy changed the scenario for them. In the beginning of militancy in the valley, those women felt especially constrained who had grown up in entirely different environment before. According to a respondent who is working in an institute of higher education:

I belong to a liberal family. My father was in Govt. service and my mother was a Govt. teacher. We were two sisters and two brothers. I and my sister were always encouraged to take part in extra-curricular activities including sports and cultural programmes by our family members. We were allowed to take any line of education. But, militancy brought a sea change in life for us. My mother who herself was very modern became traditional. Even we were asked to cover our heads while going outside. All the freedom and carefree attitude of early times was lost. I used to go direct to college and back. Many times, my father accompanied me to the college and many times, I found my brother standing outside college at the time it gets off, to pick me up. I found all this so strange and traumatic to deal with.

How women felt constrained and oppressed during this time was reflected by one respondent:

It seems that the conflict has changed the women of the region. Earlier, they used to enjoy so much and had an open mind and attitude. One could listen their laughing and joking in public space. Their participation in various events like theatre, cultural programmes, sports and picnics was overwhelming. But militancy changed everything. Neither such activities take place anymore nor are girls enjoying anymore.

MILITARISATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETY

On the whole, militancy brought about deep rooted changes in the society. The presence of gun not only brought about militarised response of the state but also militarised the society. The social and cultural processes therefore were affected due to the militarization. Khan argues, “The anarchy that pervades the cultural and political fabric of J&K has been stoked by government sponsored militants and foreign mercenaries. Such an unwieldy situation has rendered women psychologically incarcerated and does not enable an autonomous life, devoid of the pressures that people of the state have been subjected to since 1947.”⁸⁶

The militarization of society unleashed of violence of such forces. As a result, many deep rooted changes ensued in all the dimensions of social life society, culture and religion. Women were particularly affected. Their vulnerability increases in such a discourse mired by military and masculinity. To quote Khan again, “The brutalization of the culture has been rendered more lethal by the socialization of Kashmiri boys and men into a military culture. Within such a masculinist discourse and praxis, the rigidly entrenched hierarchical relationship between men and women is inextricably linked with sexualized violence.”⁸⁷

As the violence increased and the society got brutalized, women were affected by it. The brutalization of society made its way into the homes. In last two decades, Kashmir has been witnessing the increased incidents of crimes and domestic violence against women and the militarization can be held responsible for the situation.

The impact of militarisation can be clearly assessed two and half decades after the violence started in Kashmir. Looking back one can see that culture of violence has totally transformed the language of living in valley. A full generation has grown in the violence afflicted environment of the regions. For many who left arms, many have picked them up. Aggression generally describes the mood of the youth. Stones have replaced guns among the youth and there is a feeling of resentment and anger. Manisha Gangahar argues,

⁸⁶ Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, p.101.

⁸⁷ Ibid

The last few years have seen a transition to a less violent mode of mass rebellion against an imposed Indian identity. People, particularly youth in large numbers, took to the streets with stones in their hands. The act of pelting a stone at the security forces, this violence, was not aimed as an end in itself. Neither objectivity nor morality, not even nationalist or religious affiliation is at play here. The act becomes a matter of being. The random irrational or calculated rational violence contains inherent value, not merely an instrumental one. When a Kashmiri youth picks up a stone for him it involves annihilation of the enemy and not necessarily killing... At another level, for a Kashmiri, violence in any form becomes an agency that allows him to act, confirms that he is capable of action. Beyond the simple questions of acquiring control or potency, it involves a person's ability to make decisions for himself or to disagree with the status quo. Therefore, it becomes an important dimension of freedom and freedom's connection to anti state violence.⁸⁸

The armed conflict that afflicted the Kashmiri society has unleashed an unimaginable regime of violence and terror in the region. This has brought many transformations in the nature or structure of society itself. These transformations are attributable to the changed times and the massive militarization of society. Throwing light on such changes, Bashir Dabla notes,

It is generally believed that the traditional society of Kashmir about 60 years back was absolutely crime free. The dominant majority of population had neither witnessed nor heard of any major crimes committed by its members. But, today, the same society stands at its opposite extreme. We all are first hand witness to the emergence of minor and major crimes, especially violence against women in Kashmiri society. This has happened in a brief period of three to four

⁸⁸ Manisha Gangahar, "Vocabulary of Violence, *Seminar* 643-March 2013, pp.30-31

decades in a particular social context with specific factors contributing to its dynamics and continuity.⁸⁹

The people of Kashmir have a constant sense of oppression by the state and instead of appreciating the safety or security quotient of the armed forces, there has been gradual increase in the alienation amongst the masses. As noted by Inshah Malik,

The militarization of Kashmir as a means of containing the movement has resulted in a tense social situation in Kashmir. Many Third World nations have clearly sought/favoured a military solution of repression against the rebelling populations. The impurity with which militarism and state have functioned in Kashmir has left people with limited access to justice, unmindful that the subsequent transition to non-violence has questions of justice embedded in it. Street protest, stone pelting and social media are a new mix of innovative methods of fighting age old political hegemony. In this phase of the freedom movement, context has played a key role in defining its strategy. Laws like the Public Safety Act (PSA) and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) have been used to curb all manners of dissent, in the process creating adverse conditions for political stability. The sense of alienation of the people has grown, further feeding into the pro-freedom sentiment in Kashmir.⁹⁰

ABSENCE OF GENDER PERSPECTIVE:

On the whole, women's issues in Kashmir are portrayed from the perspective of gender. Kashmiri women, as Nyla Ali Khan argues are seen either as part of the Kashmiri community or the religious community. To quote her,

⁸⁹ Bashir A Dabla, 'Violence against Women in Kashmir', *Kashmir Life*, http://www.kashmirlife.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=480:violence-against-women-in-kashmir..

⁹⁰ Inshah Malik, 'The Muslim Women's struggle for justice, *Seminar* 643-March 2013, pp.52-53.

In effect, the Kashmiri women is constructed as a parchment on which the discourses of religious nationalism, secular nationalism and ethno nationalism are inscribed, and the most barbaric acts are justified by the Indian Paramilitary forces as means to rein in separatist forces and by militant organizations as means to restore the lost dignity of the 'Women'.⁹¹

The treatment meted out by conflict to the Kashmiri women, therefore, is not scrutinized through gender lens. Religion defines the limits within which women's issues are to be addressed. Infact, the identity of the community itself is being borne by women and the community's sufferings are represented through victimization of women. To quote Butalia, "In times of conflict, particularly religious conflict, it is women who carry the honour of the community on their backs and bodies and defiling their bodies' usually through rape is a way of hitting back at the other community."⁹²

The increased emphasis on women symbolizing community snatches away their subjectivity and constructs them as something other than themselves. Their bodies turn into symbols of community, nation, religion, culture and honour. In the process, they lose the person in them. They are protected, projected, used, abused, veiled, violated and hence more often treated as something which they are not. Regarding the construction of women's identity, Khan notes,

The Equation of the native woman to the motherland in nationalist rhetoric has, in recent times, becomes more forceful. In effect, the native woman is constructed as a trough within which male aspirations are nurtured and the most barbaric acts are justified as means to restore the last dignity of women ... If a woman's body belongs not to herself but to her community, then the violation of that body purportedly signifies an attack upon the honour (izzat) of the whole community...., I might add that the feminization of the 'homeland' as

⁹¹ Nyla Ali Khan, no.37, pp.109-110.

⁹² Urvashi Bhutalia, 'Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the context of armed conflict and Political Violence in India', *World bank*, Washington D.C., June 10-11, 1999

the ‘ motherland’, for which Indian soldiers, Kashmiri nationalist in Indian administered Kashmir and in Pakistan- administered Kashmir are willing to lay down their lives serves in effect to preserve the native woman in pristine retardation.⁹³

It is therefore not only the subordination of gender identity to religious identity but also the political and nationalist identity. Kashmiri identity being the most significant identity, it subsumes all other identities including the gender identity. As far as the gender issues and gender identity is concerned, it is supposed to be a part of Kashmiri identity rather than a stand-alone identity.

At this point reference can be made of women disqualification bill wherein Kashmiri identity was set against women’s rights. In the year 2010, a private member’s bill was introduced in J&K legislative assembly that sought to take away the status of permanent resident (PR) from the woman who marries outside the state. The J&K Permanent Residents (Disqualification) Bill, 2010 which was later dropped due to some technical fallacy had the capacity to put women in a very vulnerable position by seizing many of her rights including right to hold property, securing jobs in state services, voting for the legislative assembly or contesting elections. The bill is based on the premise that the PR status or the domicile of a woman is subject to the status or domicile of her husband. The rationality behind the whole discourse is the preservation of special status and autonomy of state which has the possibility to get diluted if such right is provided to women. The fear of demographic change in the region is being cited for such a step by the state govt. The bill is indicative of an attitude marred by patriarchy as against women, men are allowed to marry outside the state.

In Kashmir, there is an overwhelming feeling that the bill is necessary in the direction in which the movement is taking place in the valley. Any voices in support of women and their concerns have the tendency to dilute the movement as the focus

⁹³ Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, pp.112-113.

of the movement would be distracted. Moreover, the Kashmiris and the Kashmir themselves should be rescued before any demands for women could be raised. This leaves the impression of women not forming a part of Kashmiri society and identity. The project of emancipation of Kashmir does not seem involving emancipation of its women. Hence the two identities viz; Kashmiri identity and gender identity seem standing in opposition to each other in the region. Though the bill didn't get through in the assembly but it has left many questions to be answered regarding the standing of women in state as to for how long women would be ascribed a subordinate status in the society and any issue raised regarding their identity would be seen as a challenge to the question of nation.

WOMEN AS VICTIMS

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN AS VICTIMS

Kashmir has witnessed rampant violence since the conflict in the valley broke out. Almost every family has had the personal experience of conflict. The women have endured sufferings by way of losing loved ones, experiencing sexual exploitation, and facing destruction of home and hearth. Conflict has maximum tendency to hit the vulnerable and women as most vulnerable, have been subject to maximum marginalization in Kashmir. Women are not only relegated to inferior position but, are subject to further oppression during the conflict situation. While conflict in itself relegates women to unfavourable position, the patriarchal setting of society further exacerbates their oppression. Conflict situation in many ways intensifies the gendered discrimination and prejudices and inflicts further hardships on them and they are not able to seek reprisal for themselves. A lot many cases of rapes and victimization of women at the hands of different groups in conflict situation of Kashmir are indicative of such phenomenon at work

SEXUAL VIOLENCE- RAPES AND MOLESTATION

The vulnerability of women leads to their victimization in a conflict situation. The most common type of violence against women is sexual violence inflicted both by security personnel as well as the militants. To quote Misri,

Rape, gang rape, kidnapping and abduction to which huge numbers of Kashmiri women are subjected to, in the current conflict are the worst manifestations of sadist macho masculinity. The barbaric acts are related to the patriarchal notions of women being the property of men and therefore, the physical violations of women amount to challenging the collective 'honour' and 'purity' of communities. Women are targeted primarily to create terror and break the spirit of the 'enemy'.

Also abduction and rape became strategies for stripping women of their personal assets – honour or more precisely community honour.⁹⁴

The discourse around rapes in Kashmir involves a range of issues. Apart from the physical violation of woman, there are the societal and cultural implications of rape. Rape stigmatizes women for whole of her life and assumes the form of social rather than personal injury. Like anywhere else in the conflict situation, rapes during conflict situation of Kashmir also reflect the larger issues of ‘honour’, ‘shame’ and ‘rejection’. Women bearing the identity of their community become victims of rape by the security forces and are also faced with the life-long stigmatization and rejection by their own people. To quote Skjelback and Smith,

Rape is used not simply to attack the women but, through her to attack another target somebody whom she is believed to be protecting, for example, a male comrade in arms. The attack exploits not only the physical vulnerability of the women, but also her subsequent sense of shame and defilement, all too often the likely rejection by her partner, family and community... mass rape is a way to terrorize individuals, communities and, if done on a large enough scale, and entire ethnic group...⁹⁵

There is an element of shame involved in the acts of rape and since identity of community is written on the bodies of women, shame is brought to whole community by defiling bodies of women. There have been numerous allegation of rape of Kashmiri women by the security forces. These allegations were more frequent during the initial period of armed militancy. As the militancy changed its nature and criminalization started affecting the cadre of militants, rapes were reported to have been committed both by the security forces as well as by the militants. In mid-nineties, the sources of violence had multiplied and included apart from the security

⁹⁴ Krishna Misri, n.3, pp.- 315-316

⁹⁵ Inger Skjelsback and Dan Smith, ‘Introduction’ in Inger Skjelsback and Dan Smith (ed.s) *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, The Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2001, p.5.

forces, the indigenous militants, the jihadi elements and the counter-terrorists. As these sources of violence multiplied, the sexual abuse of women was also intensified.

It is the intensity of the crime of rape and other sexual abuses that has often been reflected in the Kashmiri political discourse. It is one of the major issues that are highlighted by the separatists to critique the Indian state and its forces. However, despite rape being brought at the centre of the separatist political discourse, the women victims do not get the required support from the community. After facing the personal injury, they are further forced to face the sense of shame and rejection by the community. Even in the political discourse, what gets highlighted, are the issues of community honour. But, by focusing on community honour, what goes missing are the trauma, pain and sufferings of women. When the 'honour' is invoked while talking about rape, it's a narrow way of understanding a grave human tragedy as on one hand, it is like belittling of women's sufferings and on the other, women and their sufferings seem inconspicuous before something like honour that has much to do with men and their social positioning rather than women's. The person in woman is missed in raising even women related issues. As Bhasin states,

This 'honour' discourse in rapes has masculine connotations. At one level, the definition of rapes as a violation of women's honour and dignity tends to stigmatize the women and make her psychological ostracisation from society easier. At another level, it is the male honour, hurt and bruised, that tends to take precedence over the suffering and stymie the women's victimization. It is interesting how this politics of rape and the aftermath proceeds, putting women in a doubly disadvantageous position, where she seems to be life with dignity but also a right to grieve. Victimization becomes eternal, something even glamorized contradicting with the syndrome of stigma, in form of protects and documentation of human rights abuse. The victim is forgotten and expected not to exist.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, n.34, p.331.

In Kashmir, there have been a number of mass uprisings against some particular cases of rapes, terming the acts as wars against the community. Despite these protests, women who are raped remain stigmatised. Much support is not forthcoming for these women and they literally have to struggle to keep going. Referring to one such case of raped woman Mariam, who had to face the trauma of coping single-handedly without any support from the community, a women's group name Women's Initiative after visiting Kashmir thus stated in its report,

Mariam's husband was publicly stripped and his stomach slit open by the BSF in early 1993. She was publicly raped. Today she has a four month old child conceived during the rape. She receives absolutely no support from anyone in the village, is extremely poor and survives by doing field labour when and if anyone employs her.⁹⁷

The most referred case of mass rape in Kashmir is that of Kunan Poshpara. Gang rape of women is alleged to have taken place in this small village of Kashmir by security personnel of Rajputana Rifles way back in 1994. This case invoked all kinds of responses and perspectives. It is one of the most frequently quoted cases by the separatists and civil society organisations to refer to oppression of Kashmiris by the agents of the Indian state. However, what remains astonishing fact, the women of this village have been living in continued shame without much societal support. The village has come to be known as the village of raped women and these women are not only stigmatised but also left on their own to fend for themselves. Hence, these women not only handled the distress of the episode but also faced the indifferent society. The government, the civil society and even their husbands deserted them to face the consequences of the event. Immediately after the incident happened, there was an uproar in Kashmir but soon it came to known as a recorded even of history without any reference to the lives and struggles of these women. Talking about the Kunan Poshpora case, women's Initiative reported a few years after the incident,

⁹⁷ Ritu Dewan, 'Humsheera, Humsaya: Sisters, Neighbours- Women's Testimonies from Kashmir, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol - XXIX No. 41, October 08, 1994, pp.2654- 2658.

No marriage has taken place in the village in the last three years. All girls, raped and not raped, are single. All the married raped women have been deserted. After intervention by militants and elders, two husbands did take their wives back, one on the condition that there be no conjugal relations, the other that he lives in the city away from his wife.... The girls are teased and taunted, even by the village men, “did you enjoy it? Want some more?” None of the girls go outside the village. Boys who got to school and college are teased by their fellow students: “You are from that raped village? Do you have fun with them now?”⁹⁸

Despite all the blood boiling of community at the plight of the raped women, they are not spared the stigma of the act which is not of their making nor of their choice. Their social exclusion continues thereby adding to their vulnerability. This was also reflected during our fieldwork. One respondent who had faced the trauma of sexual abuse thus stated:

I used to live with my husband and in-laws in a small village having a very small population. One night, security forces knocked at our door and insisted upon searching our house. All of us were told to get out of house. After searching, they didn't find anything. After the search was over, they held everybody outside but called me inside. One of their officers raped me and afterwards, they left the place. But my greatest ordeal started after that only. My husband and in-laws deserted me. I went to my parents' house. But my brothers and sisters-in-law pressurized my parents to disown me. I was left with no support. Then a NGO came to my rescue. I was not much educated so, I was provided skills to earn a decent living. Looking back in time, I wonder how much I have struggled to keep myself alive.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Another challenge that the incidents of rapes pose is that of locating them in the political scenario of the region and that challenge itself gains a political dimension when it is increasingly used by different parties to delegitimize the opposition. In Kashmir, a crucial private disaster like rape has been used by both security forces and militants to lodge allegations and counter allegations upon each other thereby reducing it to an instrument of conflict. Since the women and their bodies represent community honour, when they are raped, the ego of the community is supposedly devalued. Afterwards when any such issue is raised, it is ascribed the character of misinformation and even the rightfulness of the whole movement is brought into question. Rape has been rightly referred as a 'weapon of war' as it is firstly used to discourage the opponent by attacking at supposedly weakest link of their so called exaggerated honour and dignity and then, to snatch legitimacy of any struggle or protest from the opposition. As Jamwal notes,

Take for instance the case of the Badar Payein- Handwara rapes in November 2004. During a routine crackdown, an Army Major is alleged to have raped a woman and her 10 year old daughter, in Badar Payein, a village in Handwara in north Kashmir. The incident followed the typical tradition of two extremes. On one side was the state defending the accused army personnel (A cosmetic court martial proceedings that held the accused Major guilty of what was described as 'misconduct' would be injustice in the face of connotations of rape or molestation for women victims). On the other hand, protests by separatist leaders, cashing in on the anti-forces sentiments and mainstream leaders protesting in a bid to vie with the separatists for some limelight. In the midst of all this were statements by Dukhtaran Chief Aasiya Andrabi. While condemning the incident, she stated that the women need to protect themselves against rapes without suggesting how. But the onus of blame of rapes was obviously intended to be shared by the women as well-armed, helpless women against the armed men. Editorial comments and some articles in local newspapers in Kashmir also seemed to strangely seek inspiration from this ideology. There were long sermons in some newspapers on how

women should protect themselves from rapes by dressing up modestly. Cover their heads and bodies properly. That was expected to stop the rapists in their boots.⁹⁹

In Kashmir, there has been extensive use of accusations against armed forces of government regarding inflicting of atrocities towards civil society, especially, committing acts of rapes with women. Over the time, such accusations began to be used to delegitimize the actions of security forces in Kashmir and to project the state as the violator of rights. Feeling for the movement and identifying themselves with the community, even the women of the region endorsed such tactics. But unexpectedly, they were not spared of humiliation and sufferings that such endorsement brought along. They were not shown any sympathy and consideration by the society or the activists. As Manchanda notes

In the propaganda battle against the Indian state, women were projected as the frontline of the human rights story. Allegations of rape by the security forces were the main front of the propaganda war to crucify the Indian state's human rights record. Women were encouraged to give public testimony, videos were recorded and widely circulated. A Kashmiri academic, Hameeda Bano explained the enthusiasm with which women embraced the propaganda project of the militants. 'They (raped women) thought the whole of Kashmir had become one big family. That they would be forgiven. That there would be no social stigma as their suffering was in the cause of the movement.' They were to learn to their bitter cost – it made no difference.¹⁰⁰

Hence, in the whole discourse of rapes, instead of focusing on the women and their perspective, the limelight remains on honour, be of family and community or of

⁹⁹ Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, n.34, p.332.

¹⁰⁰ Rita Manchanda, n.48, p.90

nation and nothing but patriarchy and patriarchal values can be held responsible for that. Actually a condition of contradiction has appeared so far as the dealing with the issue of rapes in Kashmir is concerned. Patriarchal values are braced and the contributory character of women gets all the more evident when there is no attempt on part of anybody to contest the discourse around rapes focusing on the concept of honour and dishonour of community, completely forgetting the personal pain and sufferings of women. It is ironic that in Kashmir, even when women are being used for the purpose of publicity against state forces, they are not seen as aiding the movement except for their conventional roles in society as mothers, wives or victims. Rape as a crime, committed in conflict situation of Kashmir invites public attention, criticism as well as anguish but at the same time, the private repercussions of the act are left with women to deal with. Patriarchy as an ideology encourages women to contribute their part in advancement of the values of armed struggle in Kashmir but, when it comes to recognizing their agency and their support or for that matter, their involvement, it is totally shelved.

In view of double victimization of women due to rape and the stigmatization in its aftermath, many women choose to remain silent, rather than compromise their own and their family's honour. As Khan states, "Unfortunately, the innate conservatism of Kashmiri society disables them from overtly describing and condemning sexual exploitation. Kashmiri women are further dehumanized because of self-denigration that accompanies physical defilement."¹⁰¹

Where the issue of rape arouses strong emotions in the Kashmiri community, many a times, and the issue is not seen with same seriousness by the outsiders. Basically, there's a strong feeling of 'we' versus 'they'. This feeling has been reciprocated by those who critically see the Kashmiri movement and the Kashmiris as their 'others'. This can be largely stated about the Indians who describe the Kashmiri politics as 'anti-national'. For them, the more important question is the national interest and therefore for them sexual abuse of women of Kashmir by the security forces is not a significant issue. This response is reflected closer at home in the state,

¹⁰¹ Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, p.105.

especially among the people of Jammu as they identify more with the Indian state. So, when the issue of rapes is raised in Kashmir, it is not seen with same seriousness. What becomes ironical in the process is the way women also tend to be divided on the 'community' and 'national' basis. Seeing the women of Kashmir from the perspective of 'other', they remain totally insensitive to their sexual abuse. In many extreme cases, there is also justification of the rape. To quote Jamwal,

It is ironical to find out how women can do sometimes justify rape in the name of "national interest". In the three Hindu dominated districts of Jammu region in the south of Jammu and Kashmir, where a large number of men join the defence forces and para military forces, such allegations of rapes in the valley by security forces are sometimes unpalatable for women who legitimize any human rights violation including acts of sexual violation against women on basis of a crude logic that either there are tremendous pressures on the soldiers in the conflict or the allegations are leveled by 'unprincipled' Kashmiri women. This is not much different from the official line. Most cases of rape allegations have been dismissed by the army officers on the same logic stating that the victims were related to militants without any independent or transparent investigations.¹⁰²

Interestingly, the implications of rape donot stop at the act itself. The logic of rape is extended to curb women's freedom and put all kinds of controls over them. The conservative elements of the society find all kinds of reasons to assert themselves and scrutinize every move of women. Instead of generating logic for ensuring safety and security of women, the incidents of rapes have been inviting the typical response from the patriarchal society of Kashmir - that is, restricting women and their freedom. Conservative and traditional tendencies of Kashmiri society have been found to have increased their space in such vulnerable situation. As argued by Chenoy:

¹⁰² Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, n.34, p.328

Besides the social stigma, the incident of rape is further used to restrict the freedom and mobility of women. Once such a situation develops in which women are seen to be vulnerable the community's responses onwards women changes. Consequently, a new kind of conservatism surges in the society. Because of fear of being raped, women are forced to remain inside and are not allowed to anywhere without a male consort.¹⁰³

In the early years of onset of militancy in Kashmir, only security personnel were alleged to be committing crimes against women or only those cases involving security forces were highlighted but with the passage of time, many cases revealing involvement of militants in inflicting violence on women started coming out. This could be ascribed to plunge in the commitment and character of the militants and that happened with the inclusion of outside interest, money and militants which further led to the dilution of the indigenous character of the movement. It happened with the conclusion of first phase of militancy wherein the militants were locally drawn, educated and committed people. Thereafter militants started entering the movement, attracted not by the ideology of movement but, in quest of something else like money, etc. It was during this time that incidents of forced marriages and abductions started coming to fore in Kashmir. Most of such cases were linked to women acting as informers. With the entry of militants from the outside, the movement lost its indigenous character, many criminal elements entered the movement and the militants started indulging into all kinds of abuses including sexual abuse of women.

The fear of sexual abuse has exerted a lot of pressure on women of Kashmir. Women's Initiative that provided a peep into such a situation in early days of militancy reports,

In every area, we visited girls complained that they are being compelled to give up education. The most important reason is the widespread sexual harassment by the forces. While many have given

¹⁰³ Anuradha M. Chenoy, n.45, p.132

up going to school especially if the school is located at a distance, others do not dare inform their families because “if we tell them at home how the forces lift our burqas and pull our dupattas, our parents will stop us going to school.” Some girl students also had to contend with restrictions sought to be imposed by some militants entered our class and insisted that all the girls wear burqas; when our teacher told them to leave, they mishandled him.¹⁰⁴

In Kashmir, many fundamentalist organizations started issuing dictats to the women in the aftermath of incidents of rapes. The women’s dresses became particular targets of these organizations and many instructions were issued for curbing freedom of women, prescribing dress code and conduct of women. Dukhtaran -e-millat is one such organization that instructed women strictly to adopt veiling and Islamic way of life. All these fundamentalist organizations and their dictats actually added to the woes of women of Kashmir. This scenario was described by one of the respondents:

As the militancy rose, I took to veiling despite of feeling uncomfortable. Many checkpoints emerged on my way to home and security personnel used to stop everybody for questioning. I and my friends were also stopped many times at these checkpoints. My parents started pressurizing to leave the education which I resisted a lot. One day, at a checkpoint, I was stopped and asked to lift my veil. My brother was coming that way and he saw that all. That was the last day of my education as my family members insisted to leave my studies midway.

During all these years of conflict in Kashmir, women have been subject to increasing patriarchal controls. All the vulnerability of women made them face stricter norms and controls over them during the period when militancy was on peak in the region. With society getting characterized by violence, the freedom of women got

¹⁰⁴ Ritu Dewan, n.97, p.2655.

curtailed. Many restrictions were imposed on their mobility. Many women who reached upto the level of University education recalled their life that had to face restrictions during the earlier years of militancy. They narrated the struggle they faced to attain the education upto post-graduation. The vulnerable position of women due to their subordinate status in family as well as society resulted in most severe impact of conflict. This placed them in difficult situation and increased their vulnerability as well. Patriarchy therefore became more entrenched, escalating controls over women and making men more dominant.

MILITARIZATION OF SOCIETY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN

The abnormal circumstances of 1947 made the presence of armed forces in the state, especially at the borders, a foremost necessity. But, the present conflict that began in 1989 permeated the gun culture to the core of the society. Armed militancy became all pervasive leading to unplugging of restraining mechanism of state in the form of supply of armed and Para military forces including CRPF, BSF and the Army to the state. Hence, a society emerged where police, armed and paramilitary forces were everywhere and a culture of militarization was in place in Kashmir. To begin with the militarization was reflected mainly through the presence of armed forces and the infrastructure and environment that was created because of that. Besides the visibility of the security forces in the main streets, lanes and by lanes, bunkers and camps, there were other dimensions including cordon and search of the localities where any militant activity would take place, body searches of the general public, curfew and restriction of mobility at certain points of time. This in itself had implications for the people, more particularly for women. How militarisation was experienced by the people is reflected by one respondent. She stated:

One night, security forces entered our locality and they started dragging men from the houses, even young boys were also not spared. They must have the information about the entering of some militants into some house in our locality. Thereafter they started searching for them inside the houses. While searching, they passed crude comments

to the women present in the houses. They used foul language for us, the men of the house and the community as well. All of us were so scared and all the while I was wondering that those were security forces or fear forces.

Another respondent recalls:

One day the women of our neighborhood asked my mother to join them in demonstration. I was very young that time. My mother took me along. After going some far, police obstructed the procession and after the people offered resistance, a situation of complete crackdown by police emerged. Police personnel started subjecting people to massive lathicharge and didn't spare anybody in the procession. Even women and children received many blows by the police. Moreover people started running here and there due to which a lot more people got injured. I received few bruises on my body and my mother fell down and broke her arm at two places. But she didn't leave my hand during all the time. My smother couldn't work at home for months together and we faced a lot of problems running the house.

Respondents for our study have noted that the security forces, especially during the initial period were not very sensitive to the local people. In their understanding all Kashmiris were supporters of militancy and therefore were the 'enemies' who did not deserve much sympathy. In their opinion the security forces had total disregard for local people and the popular feelings. The whole society seemed falling under suspicion zone of security forces.

Women had different kinds of experiences during this period. Apart from sharing the general situational implication of militarization, the women whose relatives were militants had to face direct experiences of it. They were subjected to frequent interrogations from the security forces even if they had no contact or communication with their male relative. It was very difficult time for these women

since the support from the neighbours, friends and relatives was also not forthcoming for them.

Of various implications of militarisation, one related to creating conditions in which a large number of women were recruited as informers. These informers were working both for the security forces as well as the militants. In both the conditions they were not operating on the basis of their choice but for being caught in the situation. Many of these women were originally working for the militants but when they were confronted by the security forces, they were forced to work for them. In the process of their work as informers, many of them were actually faced with incidents of sexual abuse.

Another implication of militarisation has been reflected in the brutalisation of Kashmiri society and the increasing cases of societal and domestic violence against women. The violence against women has never been a regular feature of Kashmiri society. The tradition of Kashmir prescribes respect and better treatment of women. Women in last two and half decades have been constantly becoming victims of brutalities. The reduction in employment opportunities, increase in militarized forces around resulting into restrictions on movements and other activities, constant strikes and bandhs as also a general atmosphere of fear and suspicion has led to an increase in the frustration level of men. The violence is said to be internalised by men leading to a display of more violent behaviour by men at home. All this adds to the troubles of women as they have to face an increased level of domestic violence.

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE- STRESS AND DEPRESSION

The violence against women in conflict assumes a new dimension when the circumstances exert a lot of psychological pressure on women and they have to face a number of stress related diseases. It could be adjudged as psychological violence against women. The situation of conflict has subjected women of Kashmir to a number of situations which do not augur well for their mental wellbeing. Loss of partner, child or any other family member, destruction of home and hearth, no definite earnings, fear of harassment out of house and even no surety of security inside the

house, general environment of fear and uncertainty- all these have resulted into rise in anxiety and stress amongst the women of Kashmir.

The increase in stress and oppression has had very deep repercussions for women, especially on their psyche. The Women's Initiative report, in as early as mid-90s reflected on the psychological trauma faced by women:

In the maternity sections spontaneous abortions due to stress have doubled... The staff of the Government Psychiatric Hospital informed us that the number of OPD cases had gone up from 20 to 125 per day since 1989. Most patients are boys and young men suffering from depression, insomnia and psychological stress. Many women too suffer from stress but few are brought to hospital because of social stigma. In the hospitals, women and village people complained of what they called a heart problem, their way of describing the psychological trauma, stress and fear that has sunk into the hearts and minds of a population living with terror.¹⁰⁵

The longevity and severity of the conflict in Kashmir has had its toll of physical as well as mental well-being of women. There has been some irreversible damage done to the women. The disturbed conditions around have brought relentless angst and no hope of peace amongst the women of Kashmir. The conflict in Kashmir has affected the psyche of women irreparably. The experiences of these women vary, but the background to their experience has been the repressive and militarised environment. As stated by one of the respondents:

I was pregnant when one day I went to buy few things from the market. After some time I heard a big explosion and few seconds after I saw many people came running towards the side I was standing. I got pushed and fell down. By the time I reached home, I was having a lot

¹⁰⁵ Ritu Dewan, n.97, p.2655.

of pain in my abdomen. I had to be immediately hospitalized where I lost my child. I developed complications in my system due to which I could never give birth to child. Every now and then my husband and in-laws talk about bringing another wife for my husband. I live in constant fear of losing my husband and home. The conflict has destroyed my life beyond repair.

As the psychologists have reported, there has been increase in the psychological diseases in Kashmir over the years. Referring to a leading psychologist, Ramachandran has noted that:

The trauma caused by torture, sexual violence, death or disappearance of family members has led to a tenfold increase in the number of psychiatric cases in the Valley. Most of these are women. Huge crowds wait outside the outpatient department (OPD) at Srinagar's mental hospital. The number of OPD consultations which was 1700 in 1971, jumped to 17000 in 1992 and then to 32000 in 1999. Almost every other women in the valley says she has a 'heart ailment'- referring to the feeling of constant anxiety ... The most common psychiatric problem is depression, followed by anxiety , post-traumatic stress disorders and psychosomatic illness. Women account for most of the cases.¹⁰⁶

WIDOWS AND HALF-WIDOWS: ECONOMIC VIOLENCE AND THE TRAUMA

However, one of the most severe implications of the conflict situation on women has been the large number of widows and 'half-widows'. Young or old, the women of Kashmir who lost their husbands to the struggle in the region have been facing enormous difficulties and bearing immense burden to survive in society. As early as 2003, A R Hanjoora – Vice President of the J&K Confederation of social and

¹⁰⁶ Sudha Ramachandran and Sonia Jabbar, n.84, p.25

Charitable Voluntary Organizations had noted the number of women widowed to be at least 12000. “Dardpura village alone has 108 widows, he says. A survey conducted two years ago revealed that over 7012 girls have been orphaned. Most of the widows are very young.”¹⁰⁷

Death of husbands left these women with a number of issues to deal with. These widows face numerous problems, social, economic as well as psychological. First of all, the state of widowhood itself invariably carries an element of stigma with it. Secondly, the loss of earning member or any male member of the family has the capacity to wreak havoc on the people left in the family, especially the women. Sustenance of the family becomes the primary issue in the aftermath. During the course of the research work in present study, many such cases came into view. To quote a few, one of the respondents said:

One day my husband was returning from office. He was a government employee. On his way home, he got caught in cross firing between security personnel and militants. He was hit by a bullet and he died on the spot. After his death, I couldn't get his job as I was not educated. Instead, my husband's brother got the job but he didn't support my family. I had three children to feed, so I had to take some work at hands. Since I knew the work of embroidery, an NGO came to my rescue and I could survive with my family.”

Another respondent stated:

One afternoon, my husband's cousin came to our house with two of his friends in the evening. He was to spend night at our place. As the night was falling, security forces surrounded our house and after giving few warnings, started firing towards our house. My husband's cousin escaped with one of his friend. One of his friends and my husband

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.17

received bullets and died there only. We were left with no earning member in the family. I had to depend upon charity of my relatives for some time which, too, vanished after a period and I had to seek some meaningful employment outside house.

Besides the widows, there is also large number of Half Widows. Half Widows are the wives of men who went missing during the conflict situation and for many years together, there is no knowledge of their whereabouts. Often the armed forces are held responsible for disappearances as mostly the security forces took away these men for interrogation and then, they never returned. The security forces allege the crossing over to other side of border for such disappearances. Being half widows is much more traumatic for women than being widows as in absence of any clue about their men, these women spend a life of uncertainty where they are hanging in between the two statuses of “married” and “widows”. To quote Ishah Malik,

Widowhood is a common state in all societies facing conflict, but the concept of “half widows” is new and demands attention. The ‘Half widows’ are those women whose husbands have disappeared or have been subjected to enforced disappearance by the state. These women are on their own, helping their families to survive, while dealing with the complicated position of their marital status. They are married and yet not married; it is a chaotic state as the number of such women in Kashmir is really high. Widows in Kashmir are especially hard hit. The low status accorded to widows is embedded in Kashmiri society, cutting across class, and for half widows the stigma is even worse. They have to take up the reins of running a family with little or no education. Many have never worked outside their homes before. Moreover, they can neither claim compensation from the govt. that other widows are entitled to, nor inherit the property of their husbands. In many cases, they have been forced to leave their in laws house and either return to their parents or try and eke out a living on their own.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Inshah Malik, n. 90, p.53

There are numerous social and legal repercussions of being “Half Widow” related to re marriage, inheritance, property and compensation. The women cannot remarry till they are proclaimed widows or have to wait for seven years as prescribed by customs. Claiming that mostly men, who disappeared, had been picked up by security forces, Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) fixes their number around 10000. “There are many families of disappeared persons who are on the verge of starvation. There are hundreds of half widows (grass widows), who are in a dilemma whether to remarry or not.”¹⁰⁹ The Half widows face a lot of social issues surrounding their plight. Most of these women belong to lower classes and lead a deplorable life as they suffer harassment at the hands of their relatives and are not able to receive entitlement to her husband’s property. The trauma of being a half-widow is enormous. As stated by one of the respondents:

I was very young when I got married. After few months of marriage, one day, in the middle of the night, security forces came and took my husband for some interrogation (as they told us that time). Next morning, my father-in-law went looking for my husband. But as per the security personnel, they left my husband that night itself. We had no clue about his whereabouts. I was expecting that time and after few months I gave birth to a baby boy. We still don’t know as to what happened to my husband. After few years, my father-in-law passed away. I worked as domestic help in people’s houses to run my home and ensure the survival of my mother-in-law and my son. My son used to ask about his “abbu” and I had no answer. When he grew up to understand the situation in Kashmir, he asked me as to his father was involved in some separatist activities for which, I again had no answer. Today he has grown young and understands everything. I fear for him a lot. I donot allow him to participate in any demonstration.”

It is not only the loss of husband but also the loss of sons which led to economic burden on women. As a respondent narrated:

¹⁰⁹ Parveena Ahanger cited by Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, p.103.

My son was a calm and quiet child. He had very few friends. One day, in the morning, he was studying in his room when I heard some boys calling him from the outer door of the house. He promised me of coming after some time and went with his friends. He didn't come till evening and meanwhile I received some news about the firing on protesters in other part of the city. I got panicked and began rushing here and there for some information about my son. I informed my relatives in the city and by the night, I got the information of my son's death. That was the end of my world. Till date I donot know what went wrong that day. My son was my only support after my husband passed away with cancer. I was so devastated that I didn't want to live for a single day.

Death of male relatives has the implications of impacting the normal lives of women. Not only the psychological trauma, but also the social pressure and economic hardships have been faced by women. With the earning member of the family missing, the biggest crisis that emerges before a family is its existence. As Ritu Dewan notes,

...another major issue facing Kashmiri society today is the economic survival of widows and the care of fatherless children left with aging grandparents. There are no other sources of support. Women who have some land face fewer problems but most eke out a living doing piece rate work such as making caps or by selling their labour. Feeding and rearing children is almost impossible. Some said people contribute towards the support of widows. However with the present economic depression they are able to give very little.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Ritu Dewan, n.97 p.2657.

*THE AGENCY OF WOMEN
IN CONFLICT*

CHAPTER V

THE AGENCY OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT

‘Agency refers to the ability to act or perform an action. In contemporary theory, it hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things, they do, are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed’.¹¹¹ Human Agency entails presence of competence among human beings to make choices and to impose those choices on people. Human beings make choices to achieve something that holds importance in their lives and the competence to do so is what constitutes the freedom of the individuals. Hence, agency deals with “questions of personal causality”¹¹² However; agency may also be exercised at the collective level. As Alkire notes, “Agency may be exercised at the individual level or in groups, or through democratic participation”¹¹³.

The attention on the agency of women in the conflict situation is a more recent phenomenon. In the dominant research discourse women are projected as sufferers and passive acceptors in a binary role-play. While conflict is associated with masculinity and is seen as a field for men to play in, women are projected as victims. Peace is considered a feminine quality and hence, ascribed to women. Similarly concepts related to nation, community, state and society tend to be sexualized which leads to the gendering of social experiences. But, as the recent studies have shown, the roles played by women in conflict situation are complex and women are not the mute spectators in the conflict perpetrated by men. These studies place the agency of women in different categories of perpetrators, sympathizers or helpers of the conflict. Acknowledging the activism of women in conflict situation challenges the stereotypes created by a patriarchal system, that is, men as perpetrators and women as victims.

¹¹¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, Routledge, London, 2004

¹¹² A. Bandura, ‘The Self and Mechanisms of Agency’, in J. Suls, Hillsdale (ed.) *Psychological Perspective on the Self*, NJ: Erlbaum, 1982.

¹¹³ Sakine Alkire, ‘Subjective Quantitative studies of Human Agency’, *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 74, N.1 (Jan, 2005), pp.217-260.

Conflict, seen with the lens of gender highlights new dimensions of women's activism.

In the conflict situation of Kashmir, women are essentially seen as victims. Much of the attention of the gender dimension of conflict there has been focused on women being the subject of rapes, killings and all kinds of human rights abuses. Enough attention has been paid on the impact that women face due to the loss of their husbands. As widows and half widows, they are made to raise their children single handedly with no economic support, to take care of elderly at home, to head the household. They are shown to be grieving for their sons killed or missing in conflict. So, the whole discourse in Kashmir revolves around the victimhood of women .To quote Manchanda,

The conservative patriarchal ideology of the Kashmir struggle cast women as symbols- Grieving Mother, Martyr's Mother and Raped women. It developed an instrumental relationship with women as the frontline of the propaganda war over human rights violations by the Indian state and undervalued their activism, dismissing it as accidental.¹¹⁴

Men are invariably seen occupying the centre stage of conflict. It is a fact that in Kashmir the earliest targets of armed conflict were men and they were the first ones to pick up arms but that does not mean that women were not in any way involved in the conflict situation. They have always been a part of this conflict. Their roles in the situation do not resemble that of men but, they have been visible in all phases of the conflict. They form a necessary component of the conflict and their agency is exhibited in different ways as compared to men.

To argue that women have an agency does not mean that there should be no emphasis on victimhood. Men and women both become victims of conflict and

¹¹⁴ Rita Manchanda, 'Guns and Burqa : Women in the Kashmir Conflict', in Rita Manchanda (ed.) *Women, War and Peace in South Asia : Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001 p.43.

because of patriarchal situation women have to face additional burden of victimhood. However, it would be unfair to categorize women only as victims. Reducing them to mere victims not only reinforces the gendered division of roles in conflict situation but also takes away the possibilities of their resistance that they show even while being victimized. Moreover, it also shies away from the reality that in many active conflicts, women are very much there as a part of the resistance movements and are consciously taking a political position. To quote Moser and Clark:

For women as much as for men, the experience of violent conflict, as with social life, is not built upon a single discourse. As social actors, they face alternative ways of formulating their objectives, however restricted their resources. The strategies and cultural constructions they employ are drawn from a stock of available discourses (verbal and non-verbal) that are shared with other individuals and contemporaries, Rather than simply being synonymous with individuals, actors are 'socially constructed in the light of social relations and their environments.'¹¹⁵

Resistance movements in the modern society are collective movements organized around a collective identity with which both men and women identify. It is very much possible that women may be taking different routes within the movement politics and it is also possible that they may be having positions which are different from that of men. However, in either case, they are not passive spectators in the politics and exercise their agency one way or the other. Referring to the situation of women in the conflict situation in South Asia, Sudha Ramachandran notes:

Women bear the major burden of the violence in conflict areas. However, to regard them just as passive victims would be obscuring their role as agents of change. Whether through passive resistance or protest, active combat or peace building, women in South Asia's

¹¹⁵ Caroline O.N Moser and Fiona C.Clark, 'Introduction' in Caroline O.N Moser and Fiona C.Clark (ed.s) *Victims, Perpetrators or actors: Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2005, p.5

conflict areas are slowly emerging from the sidelines. Yet, the fact that they have to function in a highly militarized environment is impeding the pace and extent to which they can determine the direction in which politics and social change will move.¹¹⁶

Roland Bleiker, in his essay 'Discourse and Human Agency' has emphasized upon the necessity of having "foundations" and at the same time a "non-essentialist notion of agency". Locating foundations in the social structure, he argues, "We need foundations, but foundations impose, exclude, and crumble, applied in awareness of their function and with a readiness to adjust them to changing circumstances." Bleiker has referred to the presence of "discursive dissent" which are "practices of resistance that engage forms of domination that are embedded in societal values and customs."

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Using this concept in the traditional societies of South Asia, one can dissect a different pattern in which agency of women is exercised. Without apparently resisting the structures of domination, they are able to bring about a change in their situation. Embedded in the traditional structures, women are able to find ways and means to negotiate in the conflict situation and in the process even subvert the traditional structures also. Hence even while being grounded in social standards and traditions, they are able to challenge some of the basic premises of some entrenched practices of society and are able to come up with ways of achieving preferred outcomes.

Various methods of resistance employ those ways and varieties of action that are embedded in the existing power arrangements in society. These power arrangements are further entrenched in different tenets, beliefs and traditions of society. So the agency tries to engage predominant structure to achieve desired result. As per Moser and Clark:

¹¹⁶ Sudha Ramachandran, 'Dying to be Equal: Women Militants and Organizational Decision Making', in Farah Faizal and Swarna Rajagopalan (ed.s) *Women, Security, South Asia : A clearing in the Thicket*, Sage Publications, N.Delhi, 2005 p.155

¹¹⁷ Roland Bleiker, 'Discourse and human Agency', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 2003, 2, (25-47), Palgrave Macmillan Ltd 1470-8914/03, www.palgrave-journals.com/cpt

... a constant universal interpretation of agency across cultures cannot be assumed ... 'Multiple realities' and the importance of place and location in the construction of identities and differences determine how identity and agency (knowledge/capability) are differently constituted. This, in turn, affects how actors attempt to cope with situations they face.¹¹⁸

Women's activism is sustained by the fact that even the tradition prescribes the role of carrying the families on women. When men are 'out there' performing the apparently more active combat roles, women do not remain bound by the four walls of the house. In Kashmir, one can witness the women activism in various forms. It has been observed in Kashmir that women indulge in confrontations and negotiations with the authorities making use of their disempowered and non-threatening positions while searching for their men when they are picked up by the security forces. Infact, while moving around, their invisibility becomes a positive force.

AGENCY OF WOMEN IN KASHMIR

There is no doubt that women have been impacted in Kashmir conflict in worst manner but, they have coped with the situation and ensured their survival during the worst kind of situation in last two and half decades. While the social structure of Kashmir afflicted with patriarchy does not allow them to be at helm of affairs, they have placed their agency in most innovative ways. However, the significance of the ways in which the women of Kashmir have displayed their agency has not been examined and analyzed extensively.

To quote Krishna Misri, "Agency oriented roles are highly visible in the political participations and mobilization of women. Outnumbering men at times, they have made their presence felt in a big way in protest rallies and dangerous political missions."¹¹⁹ During the period of separatism and militancy in Kashmir, there have

¹¹⁸ Caroline O.N Moser and Fiona C.Clark, n.115, p.5

¹¹⁹ Krishna Misri quoted in Nyla Ali Khan, no.37, p.119.

been numerous situations in which people have participated in protest demonstrations. In these demonstrations women are essential part. However it is not during the last decades of militancy that women have participated in mass demonstrations. As per the tradition of Kashmir's politics, they have always been part of mass upsurges. In fact, it is the presence of women that the demonstrations acquire the mass character in Kashmir. There have been numerous occasions since 1947 when people would come out on the streets to express their anger and discontent. In 1962, for instance, there were massive demonstrations when the sacred relic in HazratBal mosque was lost. For the weeks following that there were protests on the streets almost on every day basis. Women were in the forefront during these protests. Similarly, in 1975, after Sheikh led government was dissolved, huge demonstrations were held and the participation of women was very high in these. Again, during the two years following the overthrow of Farooq Abdullah's government, women were actively participating in street demonstrations.

Following such a tradition, in the early period of political upsurge in post-1987 period women were actively mobilized. To quote Parashar , 'Among those shouting slogans of jeeway jeeway Pakistan (Long live Pakistan); Lashkar Ayee Lashkar Ayee, India teri Mout Ayee (The Lashkar is here, India your death is here; Hum Kya Chaahte Azaadi (What do we want ? Independence) are women, in large numbers at the forefront of these protests, Women of all hues have dominated the protests.'¹²⁰

Protests and protest politics is a characteristic feature of separatist movement of Kashmir. Massive processions demanding azadi occurred on daily basis in earliest period of armed conflict and women formed the considerable part of these protests. In later period, when demonstrations took place surrounding issues of human rights abuses in valley, women again came on streets in considerable number.

¹²⁰ Swati Parashar, 'The Scared and the Sacrilegious: Exploring Woman's 'Politics' and 'Agency' in Radical Religious Movements in South Asia', *Journal of Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 11: 3-4, 435-455, p.449.

In the more recent period, there have been intensified protest politics in Kashmir, especially in the post 2007 period. In 2007 there were sporadic protests over the issue of human rights violations. In 2008, there was massive agitation lasting for a number of months over the Amarnath land issue. In 2009, there were protests in whole of Kashmir over the issue of rape and murder of two women in Shopian. In 2010, there was a prolonged protests lasting for five months over the issue of fake encounters. Women were at the forefront of all these protests. As noted by Aaliya Anujm:

In the mass protests of 2008 and 2010, an increasing number of women participated alongside men, at times even leading all women protest marches.... These summer protests of 2008 and 2010 were punctuated by protesters pelting stones at Indian troops.... Interestingly, -- women also engaged in stone throwing, together with chanting anti-Indian and pro-freedom slogans such as, “ We want freedom” and “Blood for blood.”¹²¹

There is however a class factor attached with the women participating in the street processions. Although women of all the classes do support the movement, however, the upper class and educated middle class women did not traditionally participate in these protest demonstrations. It was basically the women from the working and lower classes who used to come out in the street demonstrations. However, the movement in the 1989-90 was so massive that it swayed all the sections of the society and for the first time, women of all classes participated in it. To quote a respondent working in state administration:

Barring very elite class women, women from all sections educated, uneducated, working class, middle class professionals or house wives, participated in the political movement of early 90s. It was very unlikely earlier when mostly lower class women used to participate in

¹²¹ AaliyaAnjum, ‘The militant in her: Woman and resistance’, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/.../2011/.../2011731995821770.html..>

various processions. Even during the theft of holy relic when women were mobilized in big number, they belonged to lower economic background.

However, even while in 1989-90, women from upper and middle class background were mobilized but they did not participate in street demonstrations in as high a number. Even at that time, the women from the lower middle class and lower classes dominated the scene. As one respondent narrated:

However, very rich families either sent their children or whole families outside state. Some families even shifted their business outside the state. Many of those who stayed back didn't participate in popular upsurges. Otherwise it was a truly mass movement.

Even those women belonging to middle and upper class background who had not shifted out of Kashmir did not show their enthusiasm in participating in this kind of politics. It is a well-known fact about Kashmir that most of the demonstrations take place in downtown and inner areas of the city of Srinagar and the outer areas of the city mostly remain unaffected by these demonstrations. As another respondent residing in the posh colony around boulevard narrated:

Our area was quite peaceful. I do not remember women from our area or Jawaharnagar area, where mostly government officials and rich businessmen live, participating in the processions. Women from old town area and Maisuma area were most active. In early days of movement, except few posh colonies, women from all other areas used to participate in the demonstrations.

The participation of women in protest demonstration has not remained confined to the city of Srinagar. All over the Kashmir Valley, including its big and small towns and its rural areas, women have been the most forthcoming in registering the protest of the community by protesting in the public spaces. Although to begin with the protest demonstrations were linked with the assertion of separatist

sentiments, during the last few years, the protests around the human rights violations have increased and most of these protests are led by women. More specifically, there have been demonstrations over the issue of disappearances of the close kins, custodial deaths, rape and fake encounters. To quote Dewan, “Since 1989 women have come out on the streets in masses. The Kashmiri liberation movement would not have withstood the onslaught of state repression without the support and participation of women.”¹²² Over the years, such has been the level of participation of women in popular protests that they have formed the face of the protests in valley. During the protests, they have taken upon themselves all sorts of atrocities and crackdown by the armed forces of state.

However, it is not only through the participation of women in the protest activities that the agency of women of Kashmir can be highlighted. There is variety of ways in which women demonstrated their participation in the movement politics. However, these ways were more subtle and not as visible as the ways in which men participated. While the visibility of men was there because of their role as active combatants, the women behind the scenes and even on the streets of Kashmir played important role in deepening the movement and giving it legitimacy. More specifically, women played a very important role in legitimizing the armed militancy and violence.

In the early phase of struggle, women idealized the armed struggle and the boys involved in it so much so that they encouraged their own sons to join militancy. They not only extolled the militants but even ascribed them the eminence of heroes. The militants who lost their lives were ranked among martyrs and their funeral was used to be revered as a big event. Glorifying the militancy, they sung traditional marriage songs called ‘wun-woon’ during the funerals. This way social sanction and legitimacy was provided to the militancy. The field work of the present study revealed it more clearly. A respondent who was studying in University at that time stated:

There was so much of romanticism surrounding the whole phenomenon of armed struggle. We used to talk among ourselves

¹²² Ritu Dewan, n. 97, p.2657

about the militants and share the stories about them as if they were heroes engaged into the job of freeing the society. At that time, people were not able to see anything wrong with armed militancy as they had been carried away by it.

Another female respondent who was also studying in University narrated:

I used to talk to my cousin sisters at home about the boys of my class who had joined the militancy. It was like boasting before them about belonging to the class of boys who were contributing to the community. Even my cousins used to be so interested to listen all that stuff. Once, I distinctly remember how excited I was to tell my cousins about my former classmate coming to class with a gun. It was almost like hero worshiping of the militants.

Azadi invokes different perceptions in different sections in Kashmir. Not only the general public has different expectations from it, but the leadership which has taken upon itself the responsibility of the project carries different connotations for the term. The political meaning of the term 'Azadi' varies, let alone the local or personal meanings ascribed to it by people. A woman respondent, working in a govt. social welfare sector and running her own NGO as well, states, 'Azadi does not carry a tangible meaning for women of the region. They are conscious about the movement going on around the term 'Azadi', but do not know its substance and its range. They have a much nuanced understanding of the term as it suggests a lot and that has empowered them too.' She further narrates, 'Once I was travelling on a country side and found the road blocked by a group of women ahead. As was the time, everybody thought those women to be rallied by separatists. In few minutes, a number of spectators gathered at the place. Suddenly, a middle aged woman, from among the group of women, came forward and shouted with all her might 'hum kyachahte ? (what do we want?). Since the catch phrase of Kashmir at that time was 'Hum KyaChahte- Azadi', everybody standing there expected from the rest of women to answer 'Azadi'. But surprisingly, they shouted 'Hum KyaChahte? – Transformer. I was amazed by that reply. As I probed further, I came to know that the group of

women had gathered to express their anguish over the burnt transformer at their place and they had not received electricity from last two months. They were annoyed with indifferent attitude of government officials and so, they adopted the easy as well as popular slogan of separatists to ask for a thing of their daily use. This way, they could project their demand in a forceful way and use the discourse to empower themselves effectively.’

In modern conflict situations, women are also known as active agents of violence. We have example of such involvement of women all over the world. However, South Asia also presents an interesting picture in this case. To quote Ramachandran:

The involvement of women in armed struggle in South Asia varies in nature and extent from group to group. If at one end of the spectrum are the militant groups operating in Kashmir, which are all male units, at the other end is the LTTE, whose women cadres have carried out assassinations and participate in suicide attacks.¹²³

Ramachandran rightly argues that in Kashmir, women are not known to be actively engaged in violent activities. In such a prolonged period of militancy in the region, women militants are never heard of. This is despite the fact that the political consciousness among women is quite high and they own the resistance politics in their individual capacity. Though there are reasons to believe that women’s level of political consciousness was quite reasonable from the beginning of conflict situation, however, in the recent period of armed militancy, their level of political consciousness became quite high. Being fully involved in the situation, women were politicized and mobilized along with men.

In Kashmir, apart from armed militancy, the period after 1989 has been characterized by mass upsurges and the popular sentiment of Azadi became the slogan

¹²³ Sudha Ramachandran, n.116, p.156.

of the masses. These protests were not confined to active members but, had trickled down to the ordinary people of the region. Where everything was getting affected by the on-going movement in the region, even the women didn't remain untouched by it. The whole atmosphere was charged with a consistent stream of protests in Kashmir and notably women constituted an important part of the protests. In numbers, they were matching men in the demonstrations. Infact, the scale of their participation was so large that they formed the face of the protests in Kashmir. As per one female respondent, "During the early years of movement in Kashmir, change was discernible in surroundings. As I was studying outside the state, I distinctly remember the changes when I came home in 1989-1990. Politics and politicization had afflicted the whole society. Not only people were talking about movement and Azadi in Kashmir but, were linking it to changes in outside world. A strong regional and religious consciousness had dawned on the people. Interestingly, that was happening without exception. Among my friends, the girls, whom I never saw talking politics, were taking interests in developments in the region. The most drastic part of the changes was a daily routine of demonstrations and processions in the city. Men, women and children, all were taking part in these. It was like whole society was mobilized at that time.'

For women, the politics of Azadi was not something related to men but something related to Kashmiri society as a whole of which they were significant part. Since everyone got swayed by the momentum of Azadi, women were equally swayed. Irrespective of class difference, they became strongly attached to the notion of azadi. As per one respondent:

Women were generally talking about Azadi in Kashmir. Azadi became a word of common use, not exclusive to men. Women used to fully participate in the discussions regarding the meanings and means to achieve Azadi. These women were, not necessarily very educated. You would not believe that my domestic help who was not so literate, one day offered me a lot of thinking as to what Azadi entails and that was quite astonishing to me.

Politicization was like a wave which took everything and everybody in its stride and the whole atmosphere was highly politicized. A respondent who was studying in University at that time said:

There was nothing underground at that time. Everything was happening before our eyes. All the talks about Azadi were taking place in open. In Classrooms, one who would not appear for few days was expected to join the movement. Azadi was, seemingly, at a hand's distance at that time and the feelings', she said 'were uniform among the people belonging to different classes of society'. She further narrates ' One day my grandmother entered house and told us that on her way home she listened people talking that Azadi would come in two months' time and everything good would be happening with us afterwards.

So, in the early years of the movement, the feelings regarding the inevitability of Azadi ran very strong among the masses of Kashmir.

However, despite being highly mobilized and highly politicized, women did not join the militancy. While young educated boys were motivated to become militants, there was no such tendency among women. The militant cadre on the whole remained basically confined to men. The explanation for the absence of women in the cadre of militants, even they are highly politicized can come from the cultural milieu of Kashmir which is influenced by patriarchal notions. The cultural pattern of Kashmir is such that it prescribes strictly different domains and roles for men and women. Women's role like every other south Asian society is confined to home and family and they are seen to taking to softer feminine roles in public life as compared to that of men. To quote Sudha Ramachandran, 'Only a few women appear to have participated in the actual fighting in the strife torn Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Male militants are dismissive of women's role in the armed struggle.'¹²⁴ It is a fact that in 1947, the National Conference tried to introduce militaristic values

¹²⁴ Sudha Ramachandran, n.116, pp.156-157.

among women by creating a women's militia, but even at that time the notion was much more symbolic rather than concrete. Women were given military training, but that was all. In 1989-90 period, when militants were being recruited, the idea of women being recruited was not even debated at any level. It was taken for granted both by the society as well as women that this is one field where sex-segregation is strictly applied.

Notwithstanding the fact that militancy remained exclusively a domain of men, and that women were not directly involved in it, there are situation in which women were involved in activities associated with militancy. To quote Bhasin,

Though there is no known evidence of women receiving arms training and joining the ranks of militants, there have been unconfirmed reports about a handful of girls (which are merely stray cases and not more than a dozen) having taken up arms. The Hill Kaka area (where the women were armed as village defence committee members for the first time) is an aberration. However, the militant outfits find more supporters in women, who have been deliberately occupying public space and shielding men from the ire of the security forces, than men.¹²⁵

Women during the period militancy have been known to be couriers of money and weapon. Strategically using the full veil, they have been carrying these things from one place to another. Bhasin notes,

While militarization of women has no evidence, there is reason to believe that there is an increasing presence of women in the role of informers, couriers and sources working both for the militants and the security forces. In the initial years of militancy, it was a trend to brand and label every woman in a burqa as an informer of the militants. Even women who reached the camps of security forces, often to seek the

¹²⁵ Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, n.34, p.336.

whereabouts of their missing or arrested sons and husbands, ran the risk of being branded as agents from both sides. They were looked upon with skepticism by security forces and by the militant groups or supporters of militant organizations, often even in their homes as well. Nonetheless, the increasing role of women as informers, which became more distinct in the post 1996 era, cannot be negated.¹²⁶

Apart from being the couriers and informers, women have been actively associated with militancy through their other activities. They have been known to be giving shelter, food, money, information and overall support to the militants. As per Parashar,

Women did not pick up arms or engage in arms training during the popular militancy in the early 1990's, but were instrumental in acting as support groups for militants men. They nursed and shielded the militants, and carried messages and arms. As mothers, they sang praises of the martyrdom of their sons, showered their dead bodies with dried fruits and inspired the men in their family to take up arms against the Indian State. Younger women romanticized the mujahid and an aggressive ad gun wielding masculinity was embraced and legitimized by a society otherwise known for its pacifist and Sufi values.¹²⁷

Thus even without directly participating in the militant activities, women contributed in various ways in supporting the militancy. In fact, the most important contribution of women vis-à-vis the armed militancy was through their approval and legitimization. In a society that was not traditionally violent and did not have many role models in that direction, women contributed a lot in legitimizing militancy. Not merely by eulogizing the militants but owing and approving the acts of militants as moral and just for the society. It was through their approval and associated activities

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.338.

¹²⁷ Swati Parashar, n.120, p.438.

that there was a close bonding between militants and women. As Ramachandran notes, “there were many times when situation became difficult for militants, women came out to help them remaining relevant. She specifically mentions the role of women during their protests against the ‘disappearance’ of their sons and husbands. In her understanding this ‘was critical to the survival of the militant groups especially when the movement went underground...’¹²⁸

But, as the militancy got corrupt, the Kashmiri women withdrew their support from the militants and many women in rural areas are alleged to provide information to state forces as to the locations of militants. Infact, the Indian armed forces and their operations gained an upper hand partly due to this reason.

FUNDAMENTALISM AND AGENCY OF WOMEN

In locating the agency of women in Kashmir, one does not have merely to look at the proactive and conventional roles that they assumed. In the context of complexity that was provided by the conflict situation, there were many situations where women silently but forcefully asserted their agency. In a number of instances, women took strong stands, mostly individually and sometimes collectively. Of these situations, one such situation where women asserted their agency very strongly was in reacting to the criminalization and externalization of militancy. Women at one point of time had helped legitimize militancy by accepting violence and even glamorizing it. However, as the time passed and the indigenous militancy was overtaken by the foreign jihadis and as the committed cadre of militants was now replaced by the lumpen characters and criminals, women started feeling the impact of violence. Along with the security forces, women were sexually abused by the militants and there were many cases of forced marriages, kidnapping and rapes by militants. It was in this context that women were the first to withdraw their support from the armed militancy. While supporting the movement, they stopped providing shelter and moral support to

¹²⁸ Sudha Ramachandran, n.116, pp.156-157.

the militants. It was because of the withdrawal of the support of women that militancy was de-legitimised in Kashmir by the middle of the decade of nineties.

There were many more similar cases where women silently asserted their agency. Their response to the fundamentalism and reactionary forces which were unleashed right with the onset of militancy can be cited in this context. Right in the period of 1989-90 militant groups proliferated in Kashmir and a few of these were quite conservative and while fighting the Indian state also sought to radicalise the society. These groups sought to impose cultural and religious codes on society mostly impinging on the freedom of mobility and progress of women. Their agenda included sex-segregation in public life, restriction of mobility of women, restriction on their education, and dress code for women. Being armed, these groups could easily intimidate the society and impose their diktats on people. For instance, by early nineties, the beauty parlours were banned in Kashmir, video parlours were closed, cinema halls were burnt and dress codes for women were introduced. More specifically, women were asked to veil themselves.

So far the societal response to these forces and their diktats was concerned, there was an absence of any kinds of resistance. There has been no recorded public statement of any separatist or militant leader against these forces. The society in any case had been muted so there was no societal response. Given the situation as it had developed, there was every possibility that Kashmiri society could have lost its liberal outlook towards women. Reason being that there was no public resistance to these forces and given the presence of armed militants on the one hand and patriarchal nature of society, on the other, women had no choice but to follow the diktats and change according to the designs of the fundamentalists. There was also no tradition of organized resistance by woman in Kashmir. No women's groups or women's movement ever existed which could have provided a base for organised resistance by women.

In the background of absence of much gender politics, the response of the women to the fundamentalist pressures was in the form of their silent rejection. In a very strategic response at the individual level, women refused to change either

themselves or the society which gave them lot of freedom of mobility and personal growth. Two and half decade later one can see that there has been no *talibanisation* of Kashmiri society. That Kashmiri men and women mix freely in public spaces and that the code of sex segregation has not been put in place can be seen in the streets of Kashmir as well as in educational institutions, more specifically in the University of Kashmir. There has also been no restriction on their mobility or personal growth. Again the educational statistics clearly reveals that there has been expansion of women's education in last two and half decades with larger number of women joining professional education and higher education. Similarly there has not been much change in the cultural patterns of Kashmir. The society which was sufi-dominated, continues to remain so. According to Ramachandran and Jabbar:

... Women have resisted the restrictions imposed on them ... They have, for instance, refused to wear the burqa, which they say is not a part of Kashmiri tradition, although they do cover their heads with a scarf. They have circumvented the ban on abortions and use of family planning procedures by going to Jammu for the same or having them done in Srinagar after paying a hefty sum. But these are individual efforts.¹²⁹

All the pressures on the woman of Kashmir have not derailed them from continuing the cultural tradition of Kashmir. Women had always been significant contributors to the economic activities, especially in rural areas by engaging in agricultural activities and in fact, veil was never a viable option for them. Veiling has never been a part of urban tradition even. Men and Women have always been at different levels of education, but after 1947, the number of educated women in the region has seen a steady increase. In fact, a lot of value is placed by society on the education of women and little restrictions are imposed on their mobility. Moreover, co-educational institutions are not looked upon as undesirable.

¹²⁹ Sudha Ramachandran and Sonia Jabbar, n.84, pp.23-24.

There is no doubt that women faced a number of problems during the peak period of militancy. Fears of sexual abuse apart from being killed in crossfire between security forces and militants gripped the society and hence, restrictions were imposed on women's mobility during the time of extreme violence. However, these restrictions were temporary and didn't become a way of life. Though general discrimination and an unequal status to women mired by prevalence of patriarchy in society is surely found, women are not bound in the four walls of house as they take up all sorts of jobs and opt for various career options. Hence, they are not struck due to militancy and have certainly graduated forward. So, more woman doctors and engineers can be seen today in Kashmir. Moreover, they are venturing into newer fields like Information technology, Business Administration etc.

How women used their agency in combating the reactionary forces can be clearly seen with reference to a case study of the pressure to veil them. There were continuous and frequent attempts by the fundamentalist groups to enforce the veil, however, Kashmiri women, by and large rejected these efforts. And the scenario as it prevails in Kashmir clearly reflects that despite the silence of the male leadership, whether belonging to the progressive militant groups, separatists or mainstream parties, women on their own have shunned the veil and continued to dress by their own choice.

Kashmiri women were never used to have burqa or veil as a part of their dress sense. It was only few elite women who used to veil themselves in order to look distinct as compared to other women. But common women did not wear it. Even the veil that was used was quite typically Kashmir and not the one which is now projected as the ideal one. One of our respondents, a young women, who is in service now, recalls:

We used to see white burqa worn by women when we visited our grandparent's place in the village but, black burqa has never been part of my memories. Neither in my neighborhood nor in my circles, even in college and university days, any woman was found wearing burqa.

Hence when the diktats were issued, women felt uncomfortable with the idea. But they had no choice in this matter. A refusal to go by the diktat of armed militant would have meant even the loss of life. Hence, she notes:

But militancy and the dictates issued by many fundamentalist organizations undoubtedly changed the picture of the society and of my life too. When left with no choice, I had to wear Burqa adding much to my discomfort. I felt physically restrained, many a times, in the early days of wearing burqa. As the time passed, we became more practical about the issue because we felt that we have to conform to these dictats for time being only as the mission of putting woman behind veils would not last longer.

Soon the woman of Kashmir started adopting a very pragmatic approach to the issue of veiling. A non-working, well-educated woman living in Srinagar shared her response to the compulsion of wearing veil:

I and my friends never used to wear burqa. When the militancy started in Kashmir and subsequently the calls for veiling started pouring in from fundamentalist organizations, we adopted the burqa. But, as we were in prime of our youth, we adopted a different perspective towards it. We used to discuss among our friends as to what kind of cloth with what types of embroidery and laces as also which tailor to go for. We wanted to look fashionable even with our burqas on.

The issue of veiling received quite a strategic response from the woman on the whole. Veil was used not because women had accepted it as a part of their dress but because they had to secure themselves in the given situation of violence. A non-Muslim woman who is in teaching profession thus informed as to how the symbolic dressing helped women to secure themselves in the on-going mayhem:

Once I got caught in a situation where I had to leave the vehicle I was travelling in and reach my workplace by foot. Though my office was

nearby but, it was situated in a little disturbed area. While walking down to my office, I covered my head with a scarf which I used to carry with myself since the onset of militancy. I felt safe as I was looking like most of the other woman. The sense of isolation was gone.

She further averred that ‘it was very difficult to defy the dictates of the militant organizations and the woman used to conform out of compulsion’. Hence instead of willing acceptance, the strategic use of veil or scarf was made. The reflection of such strategic use of veil could be seen whenever a call for veil was given by a militant organisation. After such call, one could see that most of women in public space would have veiled themselves. But this would not remain the pattern for long. As soon as threat seemed to be withdrawn, the veil would also disappear. Many women therefore used veil only after the militants gave a call, but did not make it a part of their dress. Moreover, young women subverted the whole concept of veiling or imposing dress code on women by making the veil a fashion symbol – by beautifying the veil itself, using fine texture and decorating it with all refineries like laces and embroidery.

In fact the phenomenon of veiling brought onto many women in Kashmir, an excitement of something new or fresh. Revealing the same thing, one of the respondents, who is a govt teacher, narrated:

I was in college when militancy rose in the valley. When various fundamentalist organizations issued dictats, we, too, resorted to wearing of veil. One day, what happened that I went to college wearing Burqa. It was all girls college. After entering college, I raised my veil and to the astonishment of my friends, I was wearing a long skirt and stylish top beneath, which I flaunted whole day among my class mates. Likewise, I used to wear jeans and all modern dresses to my college and over it, I just had to wear burqa.

This was an example of the conscious subversion of the restricting the freedom of women and restricting her sense of fashion. There were many other ways in which such subversion took place. One respondent, who was pursuing her graduation during late nineties, narrated her experience:

Burqa gave us freedom to look at anybody's face while travelling to our college which we never dared earlier. We could laugh and talk in the public without letting anybody know about us. We never used to raise our eyes in public before. So, I and my friends actually enjoyed wearing burqa at that time. Moreover, it also gave us opportunity to wear all sorts of modern dresses inside burqa in the public. Infact, we even visited restaurants few times without revealing our identity. You can very well imagine the freedom we got by putting ourselves in veils.

Another respondent said, "My father brought full length of cloth to get burqa stitched for all the female members of the family and we too saw it very enthusiastically finding it something new happening in our lives."

However, there were few women who accepted veil willingly. Larger number of women, however, accepted head scarf. But different reasons have been cited for using the head scarf by woman. As stated by one of the respondents:

With the spread of the armed conflict in the region, consciousness of being Muslim has dawned upon woman along with men. They draw their inspiration from countries like Iran and Arabian countries instead of other region of Indian and that's why Abayas worn by Kashmiri woman do not have Kashmiri origin. Instead they resemble the type used by Iranian woman.

But, the adoption of scarves or even veil is not necessarily because of militant's pressure. According to one of the respondents, few women started using it

at the time when there was no call for veiling by the militants. Citing example of her cousin, she told,

We live in a joint family system in which I have a cousin of almost my age. We have quite an open atmosphere in our house and me and my cousin never used to wear veil or scarf. But, where I still feel comfortable in clothes of latest style and prefer wearing jeans, my cousin has started wearing scarf from last three years. Surprisingly, she strictly adheres to her latest style of clothing. I think the media, the friends and her educational institution, all have a role in directing her thinking.

Further explaining the phenomenon, she referred to one of her friends and stated:

I had a lot of things in common with my friend, especially our thinking and attitude towards various issues. One fine day, she decided to wear scarf. Though very close friend of mine, she refused to discuss this part of up gradation in her dress as she felt that it was a part of her religious conviction. But, putting scarf on her head and feeling religious about it hasn't stopped her from being fashionable. She matches all her scarves with her dresses which are made up of expensive clothes and are of trendy and vibrant colours and texture.

However, for most of women in Kashmir, head scarf is a matter of choice and represents different things for different class of women. For the upward mobile, rich and upper middle class women, head scarf is both a symbol of fashion as well as a political statement. This class has set a trend which is followed by other women as well. Throwing light on such a phenomenon of fascination for the glamorous version of scarf, another respondent told,

My cousin came from Saudi Arabia with his family, to my house for few days. His daughter, who was almost my daughter's age, had a lot of beautiful abayas with different patterns of embroidery and delicate

works done on them. One day my daughter wore her one of the abayas to her college and everyone complimented her for her look. Overwhelmed by the comments she received, she decided to wear abayas on regular basis in future.

More than anything else, scarf is trendy and seen as something in vogue. One young woman respondent even quoted the reason for using scarf because Mehbooba Mufti wore it:

I used to think that scarf could be repressive and not for a person like me who always aspires for job and a public life but, somehow after watching Mehbooba Mufti, I have changed my views. She carries her public persona as nicely as she carries her scarf. She represents a strong face of Kashmiri leadership and forms a role model of many young women today in Kashmir. Even I have started wearing scarf now.

For women of lower middle class also head scarf is popular but it is not fashionable scarf but simple one. However, as revealed by one of the young respondent, it is convenient to wear scarf since wearing it one can move easily in the public space.

But, perspectives of fashion, glamour and convenience, do not represent the whole picture of reasoning for willing acceptance of veiling. Issues related to identity and religion present very powerful influence on the lives of woman too. One middle aged woman who is well educated and working in government service spoke aggressively:

All the women wearing veil or scarf are seen as if they are victims and are either ignorant or forced. I wear hijab because it reveals my identity as a Muslim which I am very proud of. Bindi on the Hindu woman's forehead or skirt on western girl's body does not draw so much attention as use of veil does as if it is wrong to wear it.

Expressing her happiness over adopting the scarf, another respondent said:

When I wear scarf, I feel as if I am wearing my religious identity which distinguishes me from others. It is like finding my roots and that has actually made me realize my religious duties which I try to perform without fail like I perform prayer five times in a day, keep fast in the month of Ramzan and try to be pious Muslim in my conduct.

Adding another perspective to the issue of headscarf, a young girl, whose brother though got killed in cross firing between police and militants but who harbours a strong feeling against armed forces, said 'If my taking up the hijab categorizes me with the militants or encourage them in their cause, I will most willingly do it and ask all my sisters to adopt it.

Hence, women have adopted veil or scarf in Kashmir out of various reasons, willingly or forcefully. But, at the same time, a number of women have refused to adopt veil or scarf under any sort of pressure and have presented silent resistance to them.

Veiling is not the single thing against which woman of Kashmir have offered an opposition. A strong resistance, though silent, has been served to various other dictates of militants. Be it sex-segregation in public places or opposition to the idea of co-education, the woman have resisted them all.

Since the onset of armed conflict, the women of Kashmir have seen a lot of challenges, As Dasgupta argues:

... even amidst this atmosphere of violence and terror, the women of Kashmir have shown resistance and a sense of discrimination. They have refused to give up their traditional value system and cherished heritage. Had they not resisted the pressures to succumb to social

customs that were alien to the Kashmiri way of life, perhaps Kashmir would have gone the way of Afghanistan.¹³⁰

Talibanization of Kashmiri society was an option which had every possibility to pervade. It was the strong opposition posed by women that such a thing could not happen. But the opposition was offered in the most silent way so that it could not invite further reactions. Remarkably, in Kashmir, the women supported the movement and identified themselves with it but, at the same time ensured that any sort of reactions could not tear them apart.

ASSOCIATION OF PARENTS OF DISAPPEARED PEOPLE (APDP)

Though mostly the agency of women in the conflict situation of Kashmir has been reflected in a subtle manner, yet there is a clear cut example of more active agency-role of women in Kashmir. This is the example of Association of Parents of Disappeared People (APDP), This is an-all women organisation started by a mother who was grieved by the disappearance of her son. Generating a politics out of her grief and providing a space for other grieving parents, she through this organisation made the issue of disappearance in Kashmir a national and international issue.

Having no affiliation with any outside agency, the organization based in Srinagar forms an impressive example of woman power. Its chairperson, Parveena Ahangar, herself sets an example of rising above the notion of victimization to present a collective resistance. Having no whereabouts of her son lost in conflict,

Parveena succeeded in assembling the relatives of persons who had been subjected to torture, death, solitary confinement and other brutal methods while in the custody of the police or military forces in various parts of the Valley. In the course of foregrounding their trials and tribulations, she participated in conferences on human rights

¹³⁰ Sumona Dasgupta, n.16 , P.20

violations in the Philipines, Thailand and Indonesia, and organized peaceful demonstrations in the backyard of India's political gurus and masters, New Delhi.¹³¹

The organization, which has created a well-knit mass base networking, has women from all over the valley as its members inclusive of both literate and illiterate, is working on the issue of disappearances and seeking legal recourse to provide justice to the parents, children and half-widows women whose husbands have disappeared and are believed to be dead but there is no evidence for the same.

Besides projecting the issue of disappearances at varied forums, APDP has documented the cases of persons who were picked up by security forces and are believed to be killed in custody but without any evidence and knowledge about their whereabouts. In doing so, it has taken a strong political stand. Though, the organization has some male members, it is predominantly the woman presence that keeps it going.¹³²

APDP has given face to numerous grieving women and hence, set a utmost stage from which they could voice their utmost concern of finding their relatives. In this way, they use their private plight to attract public attention towards a critical issue and to demand some action towards this side by appropriate authority and hence, bring their agency in public arena.

Apart from diluting the boundary between private and public, APDP has significantly gathered support of common man in the society. Infact, before APDP was formed, these women were almost ignored by the society and didn't invite much attention. To quote Misri:

Scant attention has been paid to their attempts to reconstitute their lives and to face the struggles of everyday existence. One of the ways

¹³¹ Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, P.102-3.

¹³² Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, n.34, P.338.

in which victimized and displaced Kashmiri women are rebuilding and creating meaning in their lives is by taking up agency-oriented roles. The resourcefulness of underprivileged woman in becoming part of a larger reconstitution and conflict mitigation process is to be commended. For example, Parveena Ahangar's untiring search for her son culminated in the creation of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons. This association has become a rallying forum for parents and relatives in search of missing kith and kin. Others have set up self-help groups that deal with specific issues pertaining to widows, half widows and orphans. Still others have become involved in large-scale social work and/or social activism.¹³³

In the absence of much needed help to the victims of conflict situation in Kashmir, APDP is filling the void left in the system by both govt. and separatists and in the process has been able to gather recognition for its works not only in India but, outside the country as well.

The women related to men who died or disappeared in conflict situation of Kashmir have not got much support from govt. agencies and the picture presented by separatists is not much encouraging either.¹³⁴ In that situation, the role of this organisation in providing support to women whose male relatives have disappeared is very significant.

APDP adopts peaceful methods like sit in, filing petitions in courts, hunger strikes with placards and photos of their disappeared men in their hands to protest and also try to collect money to help the victims. It presents a very powerful model of transformation of a personal loss into a political cause.

¹³³ Krishna Misri quoted in Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, P.119

¹³⁴ So far the role of separatist leadership in extending the help to such women is concerned, the money which was contributed and channeled through them to take care of the victims of the conflict was siphoned and swindled off by the majority of them (leaders) either for personal or political use and the victims were left high and dry; and forced to fend for themselves which left them in pathetic conditions where they are forced to be exploited in multi-dimensional ways. It is one of the reasons where the common masses feel disgusted against the flag bearers of Azaadi as they can't relate their miseries and conditions to them. APDP with its little means tries to cater to the needs of the families of disappeared souls. Parveena believes that the mothers who have lost their sons should be the torch bearers of the struggle for justice.

Parveena Ahangar's form of protest is significant because of the way "gendered borders" have been seamlessly traversed both in the private and the public sphere creating a space that challenges injustices by showing an alternative path of waging conflict non-violently.¹³⁵

STRUCTURE-AGENCY DEBATE AND THE REALITIES OF KASHMIR

There is an ongoing debate around the issue of agency vis-à-vis the structure. For the present study this debate assumes sufficient significance. There can be no denying the fact that the individual is controlled by the structures but that control is not complete and at the same time, the person is free to show the initiative in her actions. In Kashmir too, women operated their agency within the confines offered by the structure, that is, the Kashmiri society.

The concept of agency is sometimes mistaken as individualism which looks at individuals and their actions as boxed separately from any societal influence which is nothing but an extreme approach of looking at things. Agency acknowledges the presence of a number of groups with different degrees of power and hence the presence of pluralism. What the concept of agency emphasizes upon is the element of independent choice and capacity shown by the person. On the other hand, the approach that explains all phenomena in terms of social circumstances and conditions. The actions of an individual are abstained of the element of autonomy and the social context in which the actor is placed, explains the reasoning behind her action. This structuralist approach gives a very deterministic viewpoint of the system.

Structure manifests itself through the actions of the individuals and hence survives over the agency and in the process, the agency contributes to the alterations in the structure. The same position has been taken by the present study when it puts

¹³⁵ Sumona Dasgupta, 'Renegotiating Internal Boundaries' in Paula Banerjee and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury (eds.) *Women in Indian Borderlands*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, P.115.

forth that a firmly established structure of patriarchy affected the actions of women in myriad manners in Kashmir. But through their agency and enterprise, women brought a lot of changes in it that led to the reconstruction of many of the structures and processes of society.

Anthony Giddens, in his book, *The Constitution of Society* (1984), gave "Structuration Theory" in which he tried to suggest a midway between the dichotomy of agency and structure by proposing that agency is both cause and outcome of social structure. The interface between structure consisting of norms and the agency has been termed as "structuration" by Giddens while the capacity of the actor to bring some deliberate changes in the structure is known as "reflexivity". When the "reflexivity" of an individual is referred, the individual is supposed to have an understanding of the motives and consequences of his or her actions.¹³⁶ In Kashmir, the agency of women was actually the product of social settings and at the same time, was responsible for bringing changes in them.

So, the interrelatedness and reciprocal relationship between structure and agency has been emphasized upon by Giddens. Throwing light upon structure-agency debate, Loyal and Barnes argues that the agency stands for,

The freedom of the contingently acting subject over and against the constraints that are thought to derive from enduring social structures. To the extent that human beings have agency, they may act independently of and in opposition to structural constraints, and/or may (re)constitute social structures through their freely chosen actions. To the extent that they lack agency, human beings are conceived of as automata, following the dictates of social structures and exercising no choice in what they do. That, at any rate, is the commonest way of

¹³⁶ Anthony, Giddens (1984) *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK: p.258

contrasting agency and structure in the context of what has become known as the structure/agency debate.¹³⁷

Agency is exercised by people for achieving their personal ends as well as the social objectives. According to different thinkers, the concept of Agency focuses on various elements like Empowerment, Autonomy, Self-determination, Creativity and freedom. All the elements work in the direction of bringing changes in what is given to the actor. The construction of agency and the reactions to the situations depends on various factors like place, culture, social structure etc. “ The notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Within the limits of information, uncertainty and other constraints that exist, social actors are ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘capable’.”¹³⁸

In the similar manner, in the absence of any organized movement or campaign in the region, it was at the level of individuals that the opposition was presented by the women of Kashmir to the repression they could receive in the name of religion to keep intact at least, the freedom enjoyed by them traditionally. The resistance by woman in Kashmir carries specificity and it is largely due to the society being patriarchal in nature. According to Manchanda:

In protracted conflict situations like Kashmir where the cultural space for woman in the public sphere is highly restricted, woman’s political mobilization has been manifested in domestic activism. In their everyday life, ordinary woman forged survival strategies for their families and communities; they entered into negotiations of power with the security forces and the administration for the rescue and safety of their families. Their traditional roles as mothers and wives were

¹³⁷ S. Loyal & B. Barnes, ‘ “Agency” as a Red Herring in Social Theory’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* , SAGE journals, 2001: 31: 4 pp.507-524

¹³⁸ N.Long, ‘from Paradigm lost to Paradigm Regained?’ In N.Long and A.Long (eds) *Battlefields of Knowledge: The interlocking of theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992.

‘stretched’ as they emerged as agents of political resistance. The collapse of the divide between the public and private spheres following the societal upheaval attendant on conflict pushed women into negotiations of power in the public sphere as the management of survival became politicized. Indeed, the political mobilization of the domestic sphere challenged the dichotomy between the domestic and public sphere of politics.¹³⁹

Hence, the very basis on which the concept of Patriarchy stands, that is, the distinction between public and private, is getting challenged in Kashmir. The patriarchy which shrinks the public space for woman, the same patriarchy gets dissolved to widen the private space to turn it into public space. When Kashmir was seeing the upsurge of armed conflict,

Illiterate women, whose sons, spouses, brothers or fathers were serving jail sentences in different parts of Kashmir and India, began to follow their legal suits, contacted lawyers, got to learn about the draconian laws under which their beloved ones were imprisoned, got exposed to the legal clauses and knew which judges were hearing their cases. They began to visit various jails, torture and detention centres and travelled to alien places, which provided them diverse exposure, and they are well aware of the location of prisons, courts and cheap hotels to stay during which the trial was going on. Thus their personal tragedies made them emerge as empowered women, who control the lives of their kith and kin, despite the impediments of education, gender and birth’s.¹⁴⁰

Women have innovated forms of resistance grounded in the cultural space of woman, especially around mourning, for example, the Association of the Parents of the Disappeared (Kashmir’s Mothers Front), which politicizes the Women’s

¹³⁹ Rita Manchanda, n.114, P.43-44

¹⁴⁰ MushtaqUIHaq Ahmad, ‘Has conflict empowered Kashmiri woman’ Kashmir Dispatch, Sept 9, 2011, <http://www.kashmirdispatch.com/others/09095748-has-conflict-empowered-kashmiri-women.htm>

traditional motherist role by taking the private act of mourning into the public space. Woman's ways of acting are increasingly challenged the notion of what political activity can be.¹⁴¹

Facing the adverse effects of armed conflict, the women of Kashmir have survived and moved ahead to be called agency instead of victims. The field of education in Kashmir could pose as an apt example to display their survival strategies. Throughout the period of conflict, the number of woman in educational institutions has refused to inflate. Infact, their number even in co-educational institutions, is swelling. Women are taking up, along with traditional areas, newer fields in science, technology and management. University of Kashmir seems showing a clear picture of that. Not only Kashmir, Jammu and other parts of country are providing various options of professional courses and technical fields which woman of Kashmir are actually taking up.

One respondent who herself is well educated and has two daughters said,

My daughters are very much aware about the choices available in education and hence in career. They are very competitive and have already charted their career plans when they are studying in their schools only and infact, they are doing very well in their studies. They are very technology savvy and I wonder from where they learn these latest technologies.

This statement reflects the general condition in Kashmir. The modernity, brought by globalization, which is prevailing in the whole country hasn't left the region untouched and even woman are not exceptions. Another respondent who is teaching in an educational institution stated

When we were growing, neither our parents, nor we had so much exposure that we could venture into different fields. Infact, the fields,

¹⁴¹ Rita Manchanda, n.114, P 44

per se, were limited. The first options that used to come to anybody's mind were of doctor or teacher. Now, times have changed. Conscious choices are being made in unconventional fields by both boys and girls. Girls are excelling in education and exerting their choices in the fields of both education and career. In fact, they are surpassing boys in studies and trying luck in new lines.

Kashmir has been afflicted by armed conflict from more than two decades now. A full generation has grown up during this time. Growing through all these years of armed conflict, the woman of Kashmir has shown much resilience. One of such young girl pursuing her Ph.d from Kashmir University said

It was not easy to be brought up during the time when militancy is wide spread in the area. I have been seeing the problems from my childhood. During the early period of militancy, our education was not a continuous affair. Any event in Kashmir had the capacity to close our schools for days and months together. I remember covering my syllabus at home only. We used to get bound in the four walls of our houses while the whole city got closed and our movement was wholly restricted. A lot many times, while we were in school, if something happened in the city like bomb explosion or cross firing, we were made to sit in school for longer time and we used to be very fearful in school and even while returning back to home. By the time we reached college, things were not that bad but nothing could be said about the situation with surety. Seeing all the crowd and decorations in the market, it was difficult for anybody to guess that what would happen next moment. All the hustle-bustle in the market used to give place to complete shutdown in no time. But, this shift over soon became a part of our lives. Reaching this far in my education despite of all circumstances has been a wonder and I think I am ready to face any situation in my life.

Hence, a politically charged atmosphere has made women growing in that period more politically aware and assertive at personal as well as social level in Kashmir. But, it is more likely a story at urban front. Women in rural areas have more things to tell about their lives. As Dasgupta puts it:

In rural Kashmir, the home, clearly seen as a place of refuge at least before the militancy came out into the open, became a virtual prison in the 1990s where militants could seek food and refuge and which could be searched by Indian security forces at any time. The midnight knock became a metaphor for fear and uncertainty and for woman the constant threat of gendered violence including rape and domestic violence became a lived reality.¹⁴²

Reflecting upon her experience of growing up in a Rural area, a young girl studying in Kashmir University stated,

At one point of time, the chances of completing my schooling seemed grim. Every now and then, we had to sit at home as some armed agency of govt. had been looking for militant after attack on their place a night before or the information about the death of some boy belonging to the village had come to the village. Moreover, presence of armed forces around used to give a lot of anxiety to my parents. I distinctly remember how my father was about to succumb to my grandfather's pressure for stopping my education. Thank god for my father's education and open mindedness that I could continue my education. My college was a difficult affair as it was situated in city and I had to take up journey by bus to reach there. City had its own set of problems and so my road to education became all the more bumpy. Sudden shutdowns, frequent encounters, calls by militants were scary and even my father was once made to reconsider his decision to send me to college by other family members. I was forced to sit at home for

¹⁴² Sumona Dasgupta, n.135, P.99.

few weeks and only after my pleading and asserting that I was allowed to go. I had to negotiate with my family members to continue my college. Infact, I agreed to wear veil during these negotiation only. Reaching this level is quite an achievement for me.

Hence, despite of having severe constraints in their advancement, women have displayed rare courage in Kashmir. As per one respondent from Srinagar:

Though I have never faced any kind of opposition to my studies in my house, situations do put pressure and we need to cope up with that. Caught in a cross-fire, once a bullet passed by me from a distance of few centimetres. But the incident scared me so much that I could not get out of my house for few weeks and kept on thanking God for sparing me.

So, the women of Kashmir have emerged as victors in a situation afflicted with conflict and violence. They are able to cope up with circumstances rather than becoming only victims in society. The women of Kashmir have displayed their agency by achieving their objective in a silent manner as also by some collective actions. Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) is one such organization which shows agency of woman in collective.

THE PARADOX OF AGENCY OF WOMEN

Looking closer to the agency of woman in Kashmir leads one to discover a number of contradictions in the phenomenon. One of such contradiction is presented by Dukhtaran-e-Millat and its founder Aasiya Andrabi. Aasiya formed Dukhtaran-e-Millat, meaning daughters of the nation, as a socio religious organization ‘to fight social ills and secure woman’s rights as conferred on them by Islam. She worked to

ban dowry, pornographic films, prostitution and liquor stores.’¹⁴³ The organization was formed much before the onset of militancy in Kashmir. However, as the armed conflict kicked off, Dukhtaran adopted the separatist ideology and identified itself with the conflict. But, she hasn’t abandoned its social reform agenda. To quote Parashar:

Aasiya Andrabi runs her special madrassas or school for girls where Islamic and vocational teaching is undertaken. One of her early political activism was to negotiate with the State Government in Kashmir for reserved seats for woman in the local buses. She was not successful, she admitted. She has been instrumental in building community of woman around her and she has advocated that the care of destitute woman, especially widows and children of the mujhadin, must be collective social responsibility.¹⁴⁴

Dukhtaran-e-millat, an all-women organization, has its presence felt in Kashmir with not a very large membership. Aasiya Andrabi is the only woman leader who dared entering an area, that is, separatist politics, which is overwhelmingly male dominated. Infact, she claims belonging to that stream of separatist politics of Kashmir which looks at conflict from the very context of religion and instead of identifying it as a regional movement concerning local population, associate it with a larger picture of Islamic rule. Aasiya Andrabi favours Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan and does not criticize the use of armed militancy for the purpose. ‘Her role in militancy is an extension of traditional role in Kashmiri society as mother and wife that of a caregiver, a provider of shelter and of food and other essential supplies’¹⁴⁵.

A whole cadre of woman constitute the DeM along with its women leaders which separates this organization from other organizations where woman are found in subsidiary roles. The women of DeM assume very much militant roles, not by directly

¹⁴³ Ather Zia, n.18.

¹⁴⁴ Swati Parashar, n.120.

¹⁴⁵ Sudha Ramachandran, ‘Women lift veil on Kashmir Struggle’, *Asia Times*, March 7, 2002. <http://www.atimes.com/ind-pak/DC07Df01.html>

engaging into combat roles but by associating very closely with the militants. It has been suggested by some that the woman constituting Dukhtaran cadre work for militants and use burqa very strategically for carrying arms and providing other support to them. To quote Ramachandran: 'The veiled strategy is highly effective as it has been almost impossible for the Indian security forces to monitor who is behind the burqa or what she or perhaps even he is carrying.'¹⁴⁶

Aasiya Andrabi believes that Kashmir should become a purely Islamic society and hence, Dukhtaran-e-Millat is a separatist organization that associates the socio-religious agenda with the political goals. Aasiya clearly rejects secularism and says: "I don't believe that all the religions are good and that they are all based on truth."¹⁴⁷ A united Muslim empire being her ideal, she says "we believe in Muslim unity. There is no nation in Islam, and Muslims should not be divided into countries."¹⁴⁸ She, therefore, strongly favours Kashmir to be a part of Pakistan and hence, her struggle is to 'drive India out of Kashmir, and then spread Islam in the State.'¹⁴⁹

In the world scenario too, Aasiya Andrabi favours radical Islamist movement and global jihad. As quoted by Sobhrajani, Aasiya says:

For me, Jihad is not just a means to an end: it is a lifelong mission. Allah says in the Quran that jihad is the only way to uproot evil from this world... And for me, Osama bin Laden symbolizes jihad. He has the courage to challenge the world's superpower, America. As much as I hate George Bush for being the oppressor that he is, I respect and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.womansenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2883/>

¹⁴⁸ Swati Parashar, 'Woman, Militancy and security' in Laura Sjoberg, *Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspective*, Taylor and Francis, 2009, p.177

¹⁴⁹ Manisha, Sobhrajani, 'Jammu and Kashmir: Women's Role in the Post-1989 Insurgency'. *Faultlines* : Volume 19, April 2008. <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume19/Article3.htm#7> (March 8, 2009)

admire bin Laden for his bravery. In fact, I want my sons to follow in his footsteps and serve Islam and Allah the way bin Laden is doing.¹⁵⁰

Hence, both in political and social fields, Dukhtaran-e-Millat follows a radical ideology and it marks its presence in Kashmir's politics owing to this fact only. Aasiya and all the members of the organization strictly adopt veil in their lives and recommend veil for the woman of Kashmir with same strictness. Not only veil, strict dress and moral code for woman are also recommended by the organization.

Practices like celebration of Valentine day are seen as 'anti-Islamic' and are protested against by the members of Dukhtaran. On the said day picketing of shops selling Valentine Cards is one way of protest. Moral code is imposed, in general by raiding beauty parlours, restaurants, and cyber cafes. Free interaction between two sexes and beautifying or paying attention towards one's body by woman is also strongly denounced by Aasiya Andrabi. "A woman can beautify herself, but only for her husband ... He alone can tell me what he likes or doesn't like."¹⁵¹

Dukhtaran-e-millat, therefore, has strong notions about imposing Muslim way of life. Herself veiled, she wants women of Kashmir also to be veiled. As Sobhrajani notes:

In 2001, the group made headlines for publically supporting a campaign of violence against woman who refused to wear the burqa. The campaign was waged by a previously unknown group called Laskar-e-Jabbar (LeJ). Despite DeM's support, even the most militant of Kashmiri separatists condemned LeJ's actions. The Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen came out openly against the dress code and said woman should not be pressured to wear the burqa. The separatist All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and several

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south-asia/5028844.stm>

other religious, social and political groups also criticized the move as anti-Islamic.¹⁵²

So strong is the conviction of Dukhtaran about the dress code that it is known to be throwing colour on woman not wearing veil. Charges are also sometimes leveled against its activists of throwing acid on woman though the organization refuses to take that. It is ironic that the very first organization of women in Kashmir, instead of taking up woman related issues, resolved to put the women in an Islamic order and became so repressive. When the sex scandal hit the news in 2005, Dukhtaran's protests rocked the valley and "its activists went around Srinagar city raiding restaurants and claimed to have caught red handed several men and women. But ironically while the men were allowed to go, the women picked up in the raid seemed to be the greatest target".¹⁵³

Aasiya Andrabi presents quite a paradoxical picture in various respects. Gender is one such respect in which Aasia has displayed a limited vision. She places woman and her identity only in the context of religion. Aasiya's understanding of religion is very restrictive and it does invite criticism and contestation in Kashmir itself. Talking about Aasiya Andrabi, Hamida Bano, a well-known Kashmiri who is supporter of the separatist movement and who also comments on gender issues says that she is a "self-styled custodian of faith who has caricatured Islam by reducing it to the veil."¹⁵⁴ Hamida does not accept Aasiya as Kashmiri women's representative. For her, Aasiya doesn't form the face of even those women who support separatism in Kashmir. Ather Zia, another Kashmiri scholar holds the same opinion when she says that

Aasiya Andrabi's severely veiled face represents one end of the political spectrum, manifesting an extreme fringe element of religious orthodoxy wedded to a political cause. Aasiya gains much media

¹⁵² Manisha Sobhrajani, n.149

¹⁵³ Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, n.34, p. 336

¹⁵⁴ Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, p.107

recognition for her radical agenda and her sound bites spike media ratings. However, she does not entirely represent all women in the separatist movement.¹⁵⁵

Aasiya Andrabi's role in Kashmiri's Politics has got two dimensions namely, participating in separatist politics and presenting a perspective on gender. Both these dimensions are mired with contradictions. Aasiya and her organization have been able to make space for themselves in a field dominated by men in Kashmir, that is, separatist politics. Though there are some other women also who have made inroads into separatist politics, but Aasiya carries an air of difference from them. DeM has been involved in some other activities also. Apart from assuming the role of eye keeper in religious and moral fields, the organization is engaged in separatist and militant activities. ' Since 2004, the Dukhtaran-e-Millat has been working with separatist and hardliner militants groups like the Lashkar-e-jabbar to enforce the Islamic code of conduct in the valley.'¹⁵⁶

Among the women who have some visibility in Separatist politics of Kashmir, the names of Fareeda Behenji and Anjum Zamrooda Habib are well known. 'Farida Dar... accused of Lajpat Nagar bomb blasts in Delhi, and who has served a jail sentence in Kashmir, is now the founder and leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Mass Movement.'¹⁵⁷ Anjum Zamrooda Habib is the chairperson of Muslim Khwateen Markaz. The Markaz is now a constituent of Geelani's Hurriyat Conference. Zamrooda was confined in Tihar jail in Delhi for five years from 2003 onwards. Zamrooda has been associated with Hurriyat Conference from the time it was formed. Having a past in social activism, Zamrooda constituted Muslim Khawateen Markaz in early 90s. Zamrooda heads one faction of MKM which has one more faction led by Yasmeen Raja.

¹⁵⁵ AtherZiA, n.18.

¹⁵⁶ Swati Parashar, n.148, P.177.

¹⁵⁷ Swati Parashar, n.120.

Both Zamrooda and Farida have been active in separatist politics and have been to jail at some point of time, very much like Aasiya. This is the only common thing between three of them. AasiyaAndrabi is quite different from others. Through their contacts with militants in Kashmir and Pakistan as well as with Islamic ideological leaders in other parts of the world, Andrabi and her group have had a substantial impact on Kashmiri society. “Andrabi has created a niche for herself, paradoxically, in political discourses as a radical, outspoken, and yet ultra-conservative woman who is accepted by few and rejected perhaps by even fewer.”¹⁵⁸

The sheer absence of larger number of women in separatist politics of Kashmir highlights the patriarchal nature of the political movement. The limited number and role of women can be seen in the context of a traditional society with such division of labour between men and woman where politics is seen as a male domain. Woman's presence in it is not common and in fact is seen as an extension of their role in family.

Despite the paradoxes, though, these women make every effort to legitimize their own leadership and unconventional activities within normative femininity and project themselves as good wives, mothers and sisters. To illustrate, Farida Dar...the founder and leader of the Jammu-Kashmir Mass Movement... an organization of mostly men, but the burqa-clad Farida is their leader, a mother figure who proudly told me that they call her behenji...within the organization. AasiyaAndrabi is referred to as baji (elder sister). In an interview ...she mentioned more than once that she had always tried to be a good wife and mother.¹⁵⁹

Ideally, women belong to the private sphere of home and it is this belonging which justifies or approves their social role as well. Perhaps that is why, when women come into public sphere to assume some political role, they seek social sanction for it by keeping their familial role intact. They depict their political roles as extensions of their role as mothers, wives and sisters and hence instead of stepping into public

¹⁵⁸ Swati Parashar, n.148

¹⁵⁹ Swati Parashar, n.120

space, they brought their private sphere into public and claimed their private sphere to be extended. They like themselves to be called ‘baji’ or ‘behenjee’ instead of being viewed as individual political entities. In Kashmir, like any other place of south Asia woman do not confront but conform to the notion of patriarchy by transcending the familial roles and breaking into the glass casket of male world of politics. “Religio-political movements in South Asia have not demonstrated any feminist agenda nor advocated a western style ‘emancipatory’ politics for woman. Patriarchy has not been the ‘enemy other’ but instead they have colluded with patriarchy in their pursuit of exclusionary nationalism which is supposed to enhance woman’s status and rights.”¹⁶⁰ So, woman’s active role in separatist politics of Kashmir, despite present in public sphere, remains to be guided by the patriarchy and is considered representing something private.

ANOTHER PARADOX

Resisting or supporting, the women of Kashmir have failed to project themselves as political entities. The separatist organizations have tried to raise the plight of women and have projected themselves as champions of women’s issues but when it comes to imparting any importance at any level to women, all organizations falter in that. Hurriyat Conference- the most important separatist organization of Kashmir, though has Muslim Khawateen Markaz as its constituent member, rarely involves women in its meetings and protests. Even the protests or strikes organized by the Hurriyat Conference to highlight some women related issues are marked by the conspicuous absence of women, especially if the protest is taking place outside the state. This itself reflects the instrumental value of women and their sufferings for various organizations.

Despite the overwhelming support provided by women to the separatist movement in Kashmir, the leadership ranks are thoroughly occupied by men in the region. Separatist politics is characterized by male domination. Few women’s organizations having women heads like Dukhtaran-E-Millat headed by Aasiya

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

Andrabi and Muslim Khawateen Markaz headed by Anjum Zamrood, present few exceptions to the situation. Generally, women are missing in separatist politics at all levels-lower, middle and higher. However, separatist politics is not an exception as to the participation of women is concerned. The political culture of Kashmir is itself male oriented and leaves negligible space for women of the region. The absence of women in separatist politics is nothing but a part of the larger picture in Kashmir where even the mainstream politics has been dominated by men. Very few women can be seen in mainstream politics and that too, because of their family backgrounds. Referring to two famous women leaders of the region- Mehbooba Mufti and Sakina Ittoo, Hameeda argues “Mehbooba is there in politics only because Mufti did not have a son. If he had a son and wanted to train someone in the family for political role, he might have preferred the son. In that case Mehbooba would not have a role to play in Politics.”¹⁶¹ Similarly, Sakina got into the politics not with her choice but to assume the responsibility of contesting election only after her father’s death. Therefore, as per Hameeda, it is not correct to isolate separatist politics for having few women in leadership positions or cadre, in this regard.

The essentialist image of women is accepted by both men and women in Kashmir. On being probed about the lack of women in leadership positions or politics in Kashmir, the most common response pertained to the appropriateness of the system. Looking after the family is considered the most important task of women. So according to many respondents, women are not supposed to be separatist leaders or militants. They raised the questions as to who would assume the responsibilities of taking care of family, cooking and looking after the daily chores. The women of Kashmir are also made to invest in the same tenets and they try to conform to the expectations of society by not venturing into something that seems unfitting for them. To quote Manchanda, “Fear of social censure in a deeply conservative society has inhibited the organized activism of women and prevented many from assuming political roles.”¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Hameeda Bano, quoted in Sumona Das Gupta, n.16, p.30.

¹⁶² Rita Manchanda, ‘Kashmiri women demand participation in peace process’, in Peace Talks , Feb 4, 2011, <http://peacetalks.hdcentre.org/2011/02/kashmiri-women-demand-participation-in-peace-process/>

In fact, when women venture into leadership roles, a number of problems are ensued. Not only they are marginalized and considered insignificant actors, they are treated in manner that reflects their instrumental position in the movement. It is very strange that where women forms an indispensable part of resistance politics in Kashmir by their sheer participation in popular protests, they are not rendered that importance when it comes to leadership or decision making. Throwing light on such a case, Manchanda notes,

Zamrood is particularly bitter because, as a constituent member of the Hurriyat since 1993, she had expected that when she was arrested in 2003 and jailed for allegedly receiving monies from the Pakistan High Commission for the Hurriyat, the top leadership would defend her against the charges of being a ‘terrorist’. However, as she reveals in her memoir Qadi No.100, the Hurriyat disowned her and left her to be beaten and mentally tortured in Tihar jail for five years.¹⁶³

It is ironical that despite the presence of women in all protests in overwhelming number in Kashmir, they still donot form a political constituency there. Their participation is a fact that is taken for granted and there is nothing to be questioned about their support to the movement. They cannot hold any opinion that does not fall in line with the opinion of society. One does not tend to listen to women’s voices in Kashmir despite of such a large stake holding of women in the situation. What is more ironical is that the level of participation of women in protests against atrocities inflicted on the society is overwhelming while the protests against rapes, etc. invite fewer women. This depicts the precedence accorded by Kashmiri women to all the matters over their own issues which further portrays the dominance of patriarchal mould in which the minds of society and women particularly, are cast. To quote Bhasin,

... the kind of protests in which women figure prominently also makes an interesting case study. The protests would be much feebler

¹⁶³ Ibid

in cases of rapes and molestations, where a woman is seeking justice for herself. But, it becomes more strengthened in cases of torture and custodial killings or missing youth, where women come forward not just in the traditional role of mothers, daughters and sisters but also enter the public domain as household heads. This reflects the centrality of the patriarchal set up even in the role as protestors that women politically assume in the conflict. This has its own limitations as the women seem to enter the political domain only in the hierarchy of agitationists – on the streets or in the more organized form of Association of the Parents of the Disappeared (APDP) and Kashmiri Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy (both are sister organizations involved in human rights issues.)¹⁶⁴

In Kashmir, the traditional gender relations guided by patriarchal ethos of the society that clearly draws line between roles of men and women, can be held responsible for absence of women from politics. Though women are acquiring education and venturing into varied careers, they are essentially viewed as private beings. The public duties and fields, including political roles, are difficult to access unless the family support is available to them. Generally, the support to women to mark their presence in public sphere is not forthcoming. Few political families present exceptions by providing such support to their women. In such a scenario, conflict situation provides avenues to women to gain visibility and that too in the roles which are seen as logical extensions of their familial roles. Henceforth all the politics around motherhood takes place. Similarly, the status of widows or half widows is in connection to their status as wives and not as individuals. Though the public space for gaining education or work is permissible to women in Kashmir but, beyond that, the public space poses all the dangers to the safety of women as also the risk of disturbing the generally accepted social and ethical order.

In Kashmir, there is a lot political discourse surrounding women and their sufferings but at the same time, women's needs and perceptions are grossly ignored. There is negligible presence of women's organizations that could represent the

¹⁶⁴ Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, n34, p.335

women's story of conflict. As a result, there is a tendency to express the gender concerns of conflict situation as only subsidiary concerns. The women related issues tend to be pushed to margins of mainstream political discourse. For instance, the issue of sexual violence of women is central to political discourse in Kashmir but, what's lacking in it is the women's voice and concerns thereby, turning it into an issue of instrumental value to the mainstream political discourse of separatism.

Similarly, in the whole politics of rape in Kashmir, it is ironic that the most peculiar missing component is the gender perspective. This fact has complemented the discourse surrounding the victimization of women in Kashmir. The political context is what provides the background to study any phenomenon in Kashmiri society as the gender implications are largely ignored. The absence of women in determination of political discourse in the state could be ascribed as the reason for missing gender discourse. "The near absenteeism of women activism outside the traditional political organizations makes the masculine interpretation of rape and its abuse as a political ploy, the predominant feature."¹⁶⁵ The women of the state are not being able to organize themselves around women's issues. Even when some women's issue, like the issue of rapes, makes appearance, it is largely carried in some political milieu. The women's movements and gender frameworks of various processes are not so vehemently present in Jammu and Kashmir and that is reflected in the treatment of women's issues in the state.

However, for the sheer reason of it being derived from a private sphere or placed in a patriarchal context, the role of women in Kashmir's politics cannot be rejected altogether. Though the women's political role is defined as an extension of their domestic role, the reality that they have been able to dilute the line drawn for them by patriarchy and transcend their traditional role, holds a lot of importance. To quote Anjum:

The active participation by women in the Kashmir conflict involves an individual struggle for many on varying planes. It demands a

¹⁶⁵ AnuradhaBhasinJamwal, n.34, p.331

counterbalance of their private space of home and hearth with the public sphere of political action. It requires departing from gender stereotypes and creating a meaningful political space for themselves. Kashmiri society, being patriarchal and largely conservative inspite of the liberating influence of Sufi Islam is still not comfortable with a woman's active political participation in the public sphere, especially where there is a high level of risk involved as in case of separatist politics or street protest. Consequently, the woman who militate against the state have also to struggle against the wriggle themselves away from the social structures that maintain a tight grip on their lives. One would therefore feel no qualms in stating that these women give full meaning to what it means to find the militant within.¹⁶⁶

Similarly Parashar also argues that:

Whatever may be their interpretation of religion and its symbols they have adopted, these Muslim women in Kashmir... have brought their familial responsibilities into the public domain. Very often their public activism is considered an extension of their traditional roles in families but, most importantly, women have demonstrated a desire to influence politics not just through their cooking and housekeeping skills but in their capacity to mobilize publicly and to also embrace 'martyrdom' for the politics they believed in; the Muslim woman in Kashmir... have also shown that religious ideology and politics are important to their identity and they could mobilize in violent ways, if necessary, to enforce their world views.¹⁶⁷

When the women of Kashmir conform and resist patriarchy together, a number of queries come to forth about the agency of woman. What form of agency does Aasiya Andrabi display? Is she an image of patriarchy supported and reinforced by

¹⁶⁶ Aaliya Anjum, n.121

¹⁶⁷ Swati Parashar, n.120.

religion? Her activism in politics of separatism from last few years has not left this question to be answered easily.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The story of women in conflict situation in Kashmir is one of sufferings, coping up, survival, management but above all, of emerging as actors. Tracing the status of women in Kashmir from historical times to the present, there has been an entrenched system of patriarchy that defines their identity. As argued by Misri,

Constructing the identity of the Kashmiri women is less than easy given the fact that patriarchy pervaded all aspects of their lives. Contemporary social scientists and academics factor geopolitics, history, ethnicity, languages, religion class and caste as dominant variables in constructing the local identities of women and men. However, these variables go through profound changes under the far reaching impact of gender, inequality and inequity that characterize the Kashmiri society.¹⁶⁸

The rules and regulations imposed by patriarchy differ with other factors like class or caste, but gender acts as a major factor influencing the responses, behaviour,

¹⁶⁸ Krishna Misri, n.3, p.303

desires and agency of women. Kashmir, affected with armed conflict from more than two decades, is also not an exception as the societal norms and practices prescribe male domination. Even in lower classes, where women contribute substantially to the economy, the ultimate economic control rests with men only. Not only the structure and institutions of Kashmiri society afflicted with patriarchy, the politics of the region displays same character. Along with the mainstream politics, the separatist politics that has been defining more than twenty years of conflict in Kashmir, is dominated by men. Women are still to carve space for themselves. According to Khan:

Ironically, women in J&K have not yet found niches in the upper echelons of decision- making bodies political, religious or social. Asymmetrical gender hierarchies legitimized by the forceful dissemination of fundamentalist and militarized discourses portend the debasement and prostration of women. Kashmiri society needs to recognize the terror caused by such predatory discourses that swoop down on the vulnerable, devouring their ideological and experiential strengths. The retrieval of the strength that nurtured the rich experiential content of the teachings of mystic poet Lalla-Ded, the conviction of the women volunteers of WSDC, the vision of women activists who were harbingers of change in the sociopolitical and cultural realms, would facilitate the recomposition of women's roles in the significant process of nation building.¹⁶⁹

The onset of armed conflict has led to the further depreciation in the status of women in Kashmir. Women are suffering on innumerable counts in the conflict situation in Kashmir. The impact of conflict is very much gendered in nature. Due to the vulnerability of women, the most common discourse regarding women in Kashmir is that of victimization.

Women suffer due to death or disappearance of male members in the family loss of livelihood, disturbed social securing scenario and other human rights

¹⁶⁹ Nyla Ali Khan, n.37, p.123

violations. They are left to feed themselves & their families. There has been rampant use of violence, especially sexual violence, against women in Kashmiri by both militants and armed forces of the state. The logic of physical insecurity is often employed to curb mobility and freedom of women. So, restrictions on them have increased on conflict situation of Kashmir. The excessive militarization of Kashmiri society has left women more vulnerable to abuses of society and forces. Therefore, power differentials between men and women are reproduced in Kashmir. To quote Misri:

Nevertheless, it is a widely accepted fact that war and peace are gendered activities. Women do not initiate armed conflict, yet they bear the harshest brunt. The Kashmiri women as the markers of their collectivities, have become the sites for contesting political ideologies and violence. Their current anguish and victimhood is perhaps symbolized by the commonplace terms in circulation that identify them- rape victims kidnapped and abducted women, migrants, widows, ‘half widows’ and so on.¹⁷⁰

Conflict has been exacerbating the impact of patriarchy on women in Kashmir. Seen to be representing community and communal honour, they are being subject to greater communal controls. Imposition of veiling on women in Kashmir is part of such a phenomenon. It has been observed in Kashmir that there has been instrumental use of women and their plight by both state and anti-state elements while their actual conditions are generally not addressed. In doing so, the male dominated conflict leadership ignores the gendered sensitivities and reduces them merely to ‘bodies’ whose ‘honour’ needs to be protected. Women are treated as objects and not equal partners having equal stakes in conflict politics, nor as agents in their own rights. So the framework of patriarchy in which Kashmiri society has already been placed is being replicated by conflict and its gendered nature.

¹⁷⁰ Krishna Misri, n.3, p.315

The ramifications of conflict in Kashmir are not flowing in one direction only. There are both negative and positive implications for them. While conflict exacerbates the hold of patriarchy, it also loosens it up. Situation as it has evolved in Kashmir during last two decades, it has allowed women to challenge some of the fundamental premises of patriarchy and they have been to reorganize their relation to it. Transcending their images as sufferers and victims, women (especially from those parts of the society which were not very comfortable with the idea of women moving out of their four walls of domesticity), have stepped out of their homes to get engaged in some economic activity to earn and run their homes. Absence of men at homes has forced them to challenge the traditional role ascription and made them to head the households as well as to act as principal income generator and decision maker in house. In this way, the whole public space opened up for women. Seen from this perspective, one can say that conflict has exhibited the tendency to change even the most firmly ensconced institution like patriarchy.

To overcome the personal loss or tragedy at home and make possible the survival of their family members and themselves, the Kashmiri women have assumed many roles. Not only they have risen above their limitations and engaged themselves in meaningful employment, they have also been taking up the responsibility of negotiating with the state agencies. In the situation of the detention or disappearance of their family members, they have been visiting the police stations and army camps. They also get themselves acquainted with legal and official language while doing so and even become part of some larger initiative for finding their missing family members or some welfare or conflict resolution initiatives. The Association of the Parents of the Disappeared (APDP) formed by Parveena Ahangar presents such an initiative of founding an organization for the parents or relatives of the missing people. While rising above their personal losses and strategizing for their personal survival, some Kashmiri women have politicized themselves and their personal spaces in a major way. It can be inferred that in Kashmir, new gender roles and responses have emerged and women are able to transcend the limits imposed by patriarchal set up as the same gets slacked off by the conflict.

The women in Kashmir are registering their agency in many ways. Although there has been overwhelming male domination in separatist politics, women are defying the image of mere watchers of men's moves. On one hand, they are providing active support to the movement, on the other they are resisting many regulations and dictats over them. There is enough evidence to show that without taking an explicit public stand on the issues, they have succeeded in stalling the designs of changing the social fabric of Kashmir. The resistance offered by women to the issue of veiling can be referred at this point. Though there was a very solid pressure by the fundamentalist forces to coerce women to veil or to restrict their mobility. However, by adding new perceptions of looking at the veils and veiling, the women of Kashmir have given a new dimension to the issue. They frustrated the whole project of veiling.

However, it is not only in response to the threats and coercion by the gun-wielding fundamentalist militants that women have shown their agency, but also in supporting and moulding the very direction of the political movement. A study of the mass base of the movement clearly shows that women in Kashmir, while supporting their men in movement, have assumed such an important proportion that it seems impossible to carry the movement itself. As Misri argues:

The agency oriented roles of the Kashmiri women are highly visible in their massive political mobilization and activism. The conflict saw streets of Srinagar and all major towns overflow with non literate and disposed women in the vanguard of massive demonstrations and protest rallies echoing the slogans that men raised. Also mothers rush out to form human walls and protect their sons from being picked up. Several mothers groups are engaged in negotiations with civil, judicial and military authorities at various levels, to get their sons released from jails.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.320

The public space which otherwise is not available to women is claimed by them in conflict situation. The normal discourse of relegating women to the private hearth of homes gets to be challenged in abnormal circumstances. It is like normal social space is getting encroached by conflict leading to detouring of well-established social institutions and practices. Moreover, with women at the helm of affairs, there develops continuity between the public and private. Taking into public the private acts of motherhood or mourning provides an apt example of how such continuity can be maintained and how private can be transformed into public.

The women in Kashmir have shown their activism not simply by taking their private roles into public but actually venturing into hardcore public activism. Along with the mass protests and uprisings there has been direct involvement of women in movement by helping in movement of arms or men, providing support or shelter to the militants, acting as informers etc. Infact, it was the mass support provided by women that militancy gained legitimacy in the earlier period of its onset in Kashmir. For that matter, it was the turning away of women from the militancy that it got delegitimized in the valley afterwards. So the emancipatory or empowering role of conflict for women can be very clearly figured by looking at the case of Kashmir.

Women's role in the peace process in Kashmir is another field to display their agency. Conflict has taken a heavy toll on women in Kashmir and therefore women's presence in deliberation of any resolution in the region is a must. Women's stakes are highest in peace process in Kashmir as they have suffered the most. Putting men's experiences central to the study of Kashmir conflict could lead to very distinctive understanding of the situation and infact augment the very public private divide between men and women. To make the peace more inclusive as also to bring greater gender sensitivity to the process, women's involvement in peace politics needs to be ensured. Emphasizing upon the same, Seema Qazi argues,

Of equal, if not more importance is the necessity for women and their concerns to be part of any initiative in the resolution of any conflict in general and the Kashmir conflict in particular. Any policy which considers or represents women as peripheral to conflict, not only fails

to address a crucial dimension of conflict, but also perpetuates ideologies of exclusion i.e. public private dichotomies which feed and fuel conflict. Given the fact that women are among the worst affected in conflict, feminist perspectives on conflict resolution can draw the attention of policy makers to the manner and extent to which militarist policies or military intervention continue to influence women's choices and conflict and equality between women and men was acknowledged as a critical Area of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women (i) and symbolizes the recognition by the international community and states of the effects of armed conflict on women's lives . It is an endorsement of the feminist conviction that women are central to conflict as well as attempts towards its resolution and a vindication of the feminist claim that male experiences of "combat" do not necessarily bestow men the authority to appropriate the experience of conflict/war, nor can its myriad experiences –including women's experience be captured through one "master" (male) narrative of combat. This perspective is crucial towards developing and implementing policies which recognize women's roles and agency in conflict and their full and active participation as a mandatory condition for securing just and lasting peace. In effect this implies an incorporation and promotion of a gender perspective into all programmes, analyses and discussions on war and militarism in order to ensure that women and their experience inform decision making and policy initiatives in Kashmir.¹⁷²

The study of women's activism in the context of conflict situation in Kashmir surpasses the common understanding of women and conflict. The earlier lack of focus on agential roles and responses of women in Kashmir conflict has led to shortfalls in the appropriate policy response as well. While affirming the victimhood status of women, there is an urgent need to challenge that image also. There is a need to

¹⁷² Seema Qazi, 'Key Components of an Equitable and Long Lasting Peace: Armed Conflict and Women in Kashmir', http://www.lolapress.org/elec1/artenglish/kazi_e.htm.

emphasize upon the inclusion of women in various decision making forums as well. To quote Inshah Malik:

The remarkable ways in which Kashmiri Muslim women have exercised their agency has remained mostly unreported and under studied. The discourse that has emerged is indicative of a departure from the 'known' and 'accepted' discourse about both Muslim and Kashmiri women. Their activism and agency is a small motif of the larger design indicating complete autonomy and resistance to both political oppression and patriarchy within the dominant culture.¹⁷³

The armed conflict has hence provided the women in the patriarchal context of Kashmiri society, an opportunity to rise to the occasion and display their agency. There is no doubt that the propensity of conflict to increase the pressures on Kashmiri women is a fact, but women have also acquired a position of advantage following conflict with respect to their newly found status and their ability to negotiate. Conflict has enhanced women's understanding of resistance. It has led to dilution of patriarchy to some extent and hence empowerment of Kashmiri women.

¹⁷³ Inshah Malik, n.90, p.55

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